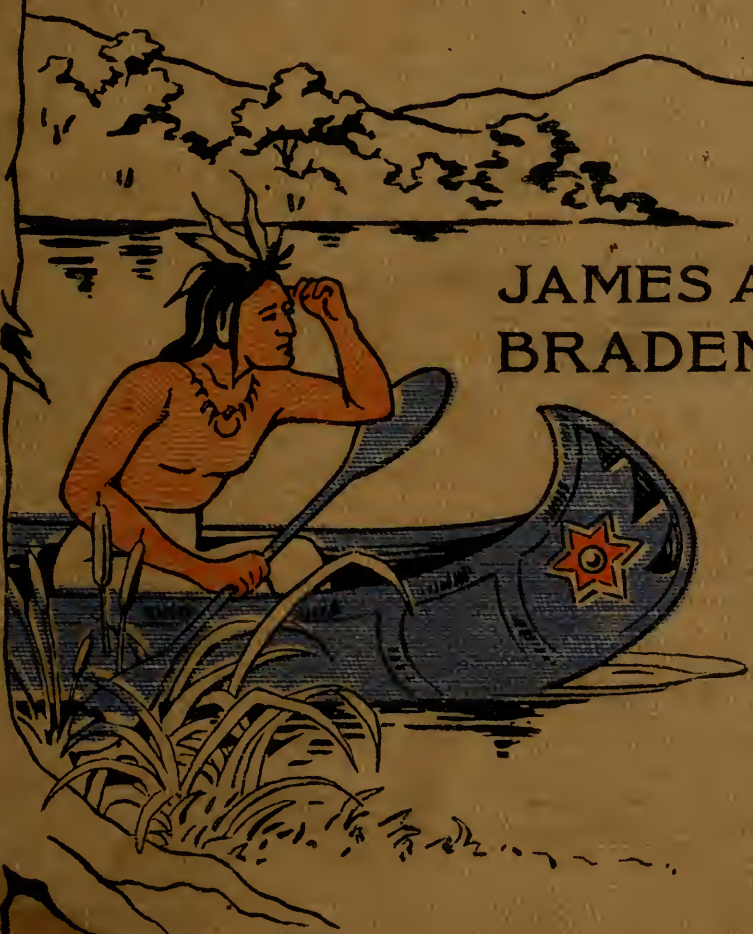
CAPTIVES THREE



JAMES A. BRADEN

Hilltabrand

Mr. Kenneth Reynolds
Custant, Ill.

Dec. 1919

NO FURTHER SIGN OF THE REDMAN COULD THE BOY DISCOVER

(P. 20)

Captives Three

By JAMES A. BRADEN

AUTHOR OF

"Far Past the Frontier"

"Connecticut Boys in the Western Reserve"

Etc., Etc.

ILLUSTRATED BY

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AKRON, OHIO

The Saalfield Publishing Co.

NEW YORK CHICAGO

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CHAPTER I.

A HOME IN THE FOREST.

"Why yes, that trader fellow did bring some bad news, but I didn't know I was looking blue over it," said Mr. Castle, passing his bowl for more milk, and helping himself to the mush.

"But you are; I knew something was troubling you the minute you came into the house," said Mrs. Castle. "Oh, why don't they let the Indians alone? And we were just getting comfortably settled!"

"I didn't say the news was about the Indians," returned Mr. Castle, with a half-hearted smile.

"But it was, wasn't it, father?" asked Clay Castle, a sturdy, dark-haired boy of fifteen, much interested in the conversation.

"Oh, papa, will the Indians come here?" ex-

claimed Nellie Castle, the boy's eleven-year-old sister, a brown-haired, bright-eyed girl in homespun, really alarmed by the troubled look on her mother's face.

Mr. Castle did not answer at once, but looked thoughtfully across the table toward the cheery blaze in the big fireplace. He was thinking of what his wife had said, and how really unfortunate it was that just as he and his little family were nicely established in their new log-cabin, there should come trouble with the Indians which, he believed, could have been avoided.

"No, Sis, the Indians won't come here—no bad ones, at any rate, I hope," the father presently answered to the girl's question. "If they do though, you just say 'Boo!' to them, and I guess they'll skeedaddle in a hurry."

This teasing reply was enough to quiét Nellie's fears for the time, but Clay and Mrs. Castle were not satisfied to let the subject pass in that way. They saw beneath Mr. Castle's seeming indifference, a feeling of uneasiness, which they could not help sharing—a feeling which, during the spring, had been growing greater and greater upon

them all, as from time to time reports and rumors of an uprising of the northwestern tribes reached them. However, as it was so plain that Mr. Castle wished not to frighten sweet, gentle Nell, they said no more.

Directly after supper, Mrs. Castle and Nellie washed the dishes, while Mr. Castle walked out toward the barn nearby, as if to finish the evening chores. Clay sat before the fire, twisting a rope of slippery elm bark, with which to tie a brand new calf that had been added to their meagre possessions of livestock a few days before.

More than an hour passed before Mr. Castle came in. Nellie had slipped into her trundle bed, which, together with the bed Mr. and Mrs. Castle occupied, was shut off from the rest of the single room by a curtain of coarse cloth; and was already asleep. First making sure of this, by peeping behind the screen, and listening to the child's measured breathing, the father took his seat near the fireplace, saying in low tones:

"I went over to have a talk with Rose. That trader told him rather more than he did me. He was there for dinner."

"Tell all about it, father. Must we go to the fort? Must we leave our cabin after all? Nellie's asleep, and we must talk this all over," said Mrs. Castle quietly, but very urgently, her fingers busy with her knitting.

"That's what I'm going to do," Mr. Castle answered, in his deliberate, reflective way, folding his arms across the front of his buckskin hunting shirt. He paused again, however, and the ruddy, flickering rays of a flaming pine knot set in the mouth of a narrow-necked earthen jar, showed upon his face a look of much anxiety.

"The trader was Panther Dilly; I saw him go through the clearing as I was planting corn," suggested Clay.

"Yes, Panther Dilly," Mr. Castle answered, coming out of his reverie. "He has been down along the Ohio, and is going on north. I wanted him to stay to supper and over night, but he wouldn't come in. And now as to the news he brings, it is nothing more than that down the river, near Yellow creek, but across on the south shore, a party of Indians and some white hunters and land jobbers have had some trouble, and the Indians—five men and a

squaw—were killed. And the redskins have taken up the hatchet, and all along the Ohio, from Fort Pitt, down, people are expecting and getting ready for a war. It looks mighty bad if all that Panther Dilly says is true, for he hears that Logan, the Mingo chief, who has always been friendly, is setting the Indians on, and is himself in war-paint. Dilly says that these Yellow Creek Indians,—some of them at any rate, were relatives of Logan. More than that, some other Indians were killed down the river a few days earlier, and the Shawnees have burned two cabins near the Kanawha, and murdered the settlers."

Mr. Castle paused once more, and Mrs. Castle sighed; she dared not speak lest she betray her fears, and her duty was to be brave.

"If Panther Dilly knows what he's talking about, I should say it does look bad," said Clay. "What does Mr. Rose think about it?"

"I had just come to that," Mr. Castle went on. "Rose and I talked it over, and we agreed that one of us must go to some of the settlements and see just what danger there is—must start the first thing in the morning."

"Who is to go?" asked Mrs. Castle, quickly looking up.

"I guess it's to be me," her husband answered, careless of his grammar.

"Why you? Why can't Mr. Rose go?" responded Mrs. Castle, in tones of disapproval. "He has no family to leave behind, as you have, and—"

"No use to fret about it, mother," Mr. Castle interrupted, "it's settled that I am to go, and when you stop to think, you'll agree that I am the one that should go, and for the very reason that I have a family and he has none. His own safety is all that directly concerns him, while I have you and Nellie to watch out for, not to mention Clay, who could take care of himself in a pinch. Then, too, if Rose went, his work would get behind, while if I go, there's Clay to keep things moving. No, it's me for it. Very likely there's no great danger, but just to be on the safe side, I'll have to put out for the settlements down below Fort Pitt by sun-up. Rose will keep an eye on all of you, and you, Clay, must look sharp. If things go well you can finish the corn planting and get some potatoes planted in the open space down near the creek."

Clay heard his father's words, with a feeling of half pleasure, half dread. He did not entirely like the plan by which he was to be left as the guardian of his mother and sister, in company with Mr. Rose, their only neighbor; and yet he was glad his father was willing to trust him. It pleased him to think that he was looked upon as a man.

"I'll keep my eyes and ears wide open, and I guess Mr. Rose needn't trouble himself very much," the boy answered, somewhat boastfully, but with courage.

His mother smiled at his show of vanity, and the conversation turned to further details of the killing of the Indians at Yellow Creek.

Panther Dilly, a hunter, trapper and Indian trader, who tramped the wilderness through and through, had been unable to tell all that had happened, but in substance it was that a man named Greathouse, and some other white men with him, camped on the south side of the Ohio River opposite Yellow Creek, were visited by five Indians and a squaw and her papoose—a part of a band of Mingoes, encamped on the opposite side of the river. The white men were, for the most part, rough char-

acters, who had been hunting and exploring down the Ohio, and who claimed that the Indians had stolen goods from them and from some settlers near Wheeling. Accordingly, they laid a plot to kill these five braves and the squaw. Three of the Indians drank liquor the whites gave them and became drunk. The others were then challenged with a wager of coonskins, to shoot at a mark. All Indians loving games of skill and chance, these two promptly accepted. But no sooner had they discharged their rifles than the white men turned and shot them down. Speedily, they then also attacked the drunken Indians, beating their brains out with tomahawks.

The Indian woman attempted to run away, but was shot, and died in a few minutes, holding her child in her arms. The baby, the white men afterward carried off with them.

Hearing the shooting, and presently discovering what had happened to their friends, the Indians remaining in their own camp, fled, and soon spread the news of the massacre.

"And just about the worst thing that could have happened," said Mr. Castle, "is that one of the In-

dians who was killed, was a brother of Logan, and the squaw was his sister. There's not a redskin in the northwest who has so much influence over the other bucks and braves. It is that, that makes me a bit afraid that what Panther Dilly says may be the truth,—that Logan has taken up the hatchet and that orders for war have been sent out from Fort Pitt."

"Oh dear!" sighed Mrs. Castle, more worried than she would have admitted, "but we must make the best of it. If you hurry, father, you can be back in three or four days, and we can get along—Clay, and Nell, and I," she added more cheerfully.

"Of course we can," the boy answered sturdily, little thinking of the dark days to follow; and presently he climbed the rude ladder which led to the loft above, and was soon asleep on his bed of deerskins.

As the pine knot, which did duty as a candle, burned nearly out, Mr. Castle covered the embers in the fireplace with ashes, that there might be live coals with which to start the fire in the morning, and Mrs. Castle, having closed the cabin's one window with a heavy shutter of puncheons, now double-

barred the door and drew in the latchstring. In a little while, no other sounds than the sighing of the wind among the trees, the distant howling of a wolf, the croak of some frogs down by the creek, and the quiet breathing of the sleeping family broke the silence in the little cabin in the wilderness.

Nellie was the first to be astir in the morning. In her coarse little homespun nightgown, she tiptoed to the fireplace, raked the live coals from among the ashes, and with a handful of dry chips, and splinters to help, soon started a cheerful blaze. Then she piled on more and larger sticks of wood, and slipped back to bed just as her father came forth and opened the door, letting in a flood of light and cool, fresh air.

Clay came climbing down from the loft a minute or two later, and he and Mr. Castle went to the barn to feed the oxen, the cow and the sheep, while Mrs. Castle prepared breakfast. It was but a little after sunrise, when the morning meal of fried mush and venison was over, and, slinging his powder-horn and bullet-bag over his shoulder, Mr. Castle made ready to start on his journey.

"I'm leaving plenty of bullets and powder for you,

Clay," he said, "but don't waste them. You had better keep your gun beside you wherever you are, just to show any one who passes, that you are on your guard. I'll be back as soon as I can, but it's more than likely that I'll go down the river first and around back by Fort Pitt, and so you mustn't look for me too soon, mother. And you be a good girl, Nell, and don't let your mother worry or work too hard."

Mr. Rose came to see his neighbor off, and with a kiss for his wife and Nellie, the husband and father hurried away.

"I think I'll go down by the creek and plant the potatoes to be put in there first, mother," said Clay when Mr. Rose had returned to his own cabin, after some talk with Mrs. Castle, and the boy and girl, in which he said he thought there was no great danger of the Indians giving them any trouble.

"And I'll help you get the seed potatoes ready," said merry Nell, entirely reassured by the encouraging talk of her father and Mr. Rose, and fearing the redmen no longer.

Mrs. Castle agreed to Clay's suggestion, and together the boy and his sister sat beside the open

door, cutting up the potatoes to be used as seed. The sprouts were already started and the tubers were cut into pieces so that on each part there should be at least one eye, or sprout.

There was not a great deal of seed to prepare, the crop of the preceding summer having been nearly a failure, and it was still early when Clay shouldered his rifle, and with the hoe and the home-made basket of potatoes in his other hand, trudged away to a natural clearing a half mile distant. This clearing was about an acre in extent. Mr. Castle said it had been an Indian cornfield at one time, but the savages had not used it for many years. In this open space, the earth was quite free of roots and the soil rich and mellow. It was judged to be a better place for the potatoes than for the corn, as the former required softer ground than the grain, and so it had been decided to plant them there, while the maize was planted nearer the cabin on the newly cleared land, still full of stumps and roots.

Mr. Castle had ploughed a plot of half an acre in the natural clearing a day or two before. Clay's work was only to dig holes a few inches deep in the softened earth, drop a couple of seeds into each,

cover them over and pass on to the next spot two or three feet ahead. He worked hard; the day was warm, and toward noon he grew hot and thirsty. Pleasant thoughts of the cool stream near the clearing's edge came to him.

"I'll have a good, big drink, and finish the whole patch before I go to dinner; I'll be only a little late," he told himself.

Approaching a pool of clear, pure water, sheltered from the sun's warm rays by a leafy beech, the boy threw himself upon the bank and bent his head to drink, but with a sudden shudder, he drew back. Reflected in the water he distinctly saw a painted, copper-colored face—the face of an Indian, whose body seemed to be concealed by the bushes at the opposite side of the pool.

CHAPTER II.

CLAY'S COURAGE TESTED.

If a venomous reptile had thrust its fiery tongue from the depths of the water to meet his lips, Clay could not have been more startled. Instantly he was upon his feet. In a moment he recovered his self-possession, with an effort mastering his first impulse, which was to run. He then began a careful scrutiny of the bushes all about him to find the savage whose face he had seen.

No further sign of the redman could the boy discover. He thought he had heard a rustle of the green leaves as he sprang to his feet, but could not be certain of it; and, decidedly mystified, his heart beating hard with excitement and alarm, he cocked his rifle, and slipped from tree to tree for some dis-

tance along the stream's banks. He was positive that he could not be mistaken—positive that he had seen a hideously painted face reflected in the water as plainly as ever he had seen his own visage in a mirror; but strange as it was, he could find nothing of the person to whom that face belonged.

"He couldn't have come or gone without leaving some sort of a trace—unless he's a ghost—or a witch," Clay reflected, and stealthily crossing the creek, he began to search for some sign of foot-prints. Bending low over the mossy ground, he discovered that some of the tiny plants and vines which sprouted up all about, were bent and broken. A number of fallen leaves had been over-turned also, for their damp sides were uppermost. No trail, such as he could readily follow, did the lad discover, however, and he was puzzled to know what to do.

"I'll hustle home, anyway," he at first decided, but as he stepped out from the shade, the bright sunlight changed the whole course of his thoughts.

Like one who awakens from a bad dream, still frightened, but inclined to laugh at his fears, Clay stood irresolute. A woodpecker was hammering

upon an old whitewood across the clearing, and on a large, dead branch of an oak, high above the ground, a crow sat, serenely pluming himself. All was so quiet, so peaceful, that the boy was almost ashamed that he had allowed himself to be so unnerved. And thinking that to hasten home and tell what he had seen would but alarm his mother and Nellie, while Mr. Rose would probably laugh at him, he returned to his potato planting, resolving to work fast and then go to the house and in a quiet, casual way let Mr. Rose know what had happened. He would not be laughed at then, at any rate. Moreover, he reasoned, the Indian must also have seen him, and if the fellow had meant harm, might easily have caught him off his guard.

Some may say, in the light of future events, that Clay Castle was a weak, timid boy; that he allowed fear of ridicule to prevent his giving the alarm when he knew that an Indian in war-paint was in the vicinity. But although that which happened afterward proved that this is what he should have done, he cannot be blamed. More real courage was required for Clay to remain at his work, haunted by the thought that from somewhere in the surround-

ing woods, a painted savage was peering out at him, than would have been necessary to meet the probable laughter of Joseph Rose. It is easy to be wise after the future has revealed itself.

The Castles were from eastern Pennsylvania. Mrs. Castle had been born and reared in the City of Brotherly Love. Mr. Castle was the son of a tavern-keeper in a hamlet near that ancient metropolis. It was while attending a school in Philadelphia that he met and fell in love with the girl, who afterward became his wife. After leaving school, he had gone west to explore the country and to hunt. Travelers at his father's inn had told wonderful stories of the richness of the then unknown northwest, the abundance of game and the prospects that some day it would be an immensely wealthy region, and these reports led the young man to visit the extreme frontier—that section of which Ohio is now a part.

He prospered in a moderate way as a hunter, and afterward as guide for land agents, and in Indian trading. The illness and death of his father obliged him to return home. His mother had been dead long since, and when his father was also laid to rest, he knew not what to do. So heavy were the debts

resting upon the Castle Inn, that he could not hope to continue the business there, and creditors took the property.

Meanwhile, the girl Jonathan Castle loved had been left an orphan, and now lived at the home of her uncle,—a brother of her mother, James Leonard, by name, and a tanner and dealer in furs by occupation. Her life there was not of the pleasantest, however, as her aunt, who was a woman who felt herself very aristocratic, bitterly objected to her niece's presence, and was at no pains to conceal her dislike.

"We will be married, Mary, and live on a little farm I know of on the Susquehanna," said young Castle, as the two told each other their troubles one day.

And in spite of the objections of the young woman's uncle, a man who, childless himself, really loved his pretty niece, and now contended that her choice of a husband was but a woodsman and Indian trader, the wedding took place.

For a number of years, the Castles lived in Pennsylvania, and there Clay and Nellie were born. But it was the firm belief of Mr. Castle that the north-

west country was destined in time to be thickly settled, and the land in great demand, and for a long time he planned to move to that section beyond the Alleghenies. Very likely, too, the old restlessness and love of the woods were upon him and did their part in prompting him to emigrate to the region of the Ohio. Two other families planned to accompany the Castles, but sickness prevented one from joining them, and the other chose then, also, to remain behind. Undaunted, Mr. Castle and his wife and children set out alone.

They traveled by ox cart and, being heavily loaded, were nearly all of one spring in reaching the place where to the east of the Muskingum River and several miles to the south of the great trail, leading from Fort Pitt to the Sandusky Plains, and on to Fort Detroit, it was decided to locate. En route they fell in with Joseph Rose, who, like themselves, was looking to establish a home in the wilderness, although he was a bachelor. He and the Castles, becoming good friends as they traveled together, it was but natural that they agreed to build their homes not far apart. This they did, helping one another to mutual advantage, and the first

summer and winter in the new country passed quite pleasantly. True, they arrived too late in the season to do much with their crops, but both men being experienced woodsmen, and Clay rapidly learning this art, they never wanted for enough to eat or for clothing or shelter. Their corn yielded fairly well, and there were Nell and Clay to pound it with heavy stone pestles in a block of hard wood, hollowed out for the purpose, into corn meal. Indians sometimes visited the neighborhood, and there were wolves, bears, panthers, deer, and other game, occasionally a few buffaloes, in the woods about the pioneer homes, but none gave any serious trouble.

The great regret of the two men was that they were "squatters,"—that is, that they did not own the land upon which they settled; but they hoped to have no trouble in buying it of the government, or of individual purchasers of large tracts as soon as surveys were completed, and having, as they believed, made peace with the Indians, with whom they had done some trading, they were quite contented. Indeed, save for those hardships which must ever accompany the life of the pioneer, all

had been pleasant with the Castles, and their only neighbor until this spring of 1774; and now in the last days of May of that year had come this man, Panther Dilly, with news of an Indian uprising.

Clay Castle hastening with his work, pausing now and then, to look about and listen, thought of some of these things as he recalled his mother's words of the evening before—"And we were just getting comfortably settled." How true it was, he reflected, as in his mind's eye he pictured the comfortable cabin in the stump-dotted clearing, Nellie's pet squirrel in his wooden cage near the door, the little garden with green things already growing in it just back of the house, his mother humming a little tune as she went about her work within, and Nell making flower beds in which to plant some vines under the window. She had said that was what she meant to do in his absence, the boy remembered.

He wondered what Mr. Rose might be doing, and mentally pictured him, also busy about his work at the other end of the clearing in which the cabins stood, work which would keep him within view from both the houses, as he had said was his plan.

All was quiet, and Clay had nearly finished his planting.

"There will not be seed enough for the whole patch," he was saying to himself, "but we can have the rest for beans, and —"

"Who-o-o! who-o!"

Clay gave a start, caught his breath and was reaching for his rifle on the ground before him.

"Mother's waiting dinner on you, Clay."

It was Nellie who, slipping up behind her brother, had sprung out at him from behind a tree. And now she laughed merrily, making a very pretty picture with her brown eyes and pink cheeks nearly concealed by the big sunbonnet she wore from beneath which her hair hung in two heavy braids.

"I'm almost through," the boy answered carelessly, making a show of indifference to conceal the surprise his sister had caused him.

"Don't you pretend I didn't scare you, Clay," the little girl laughed. "Now honest Injun, I did, didn't I?"

"Of course,—half to death," the boy answered with a brotherly smile, taking off his battered bea-

ver hat to wipe his perspiring brow upon his sleeve. "Everything's all right at the house, is it?" he asked, thinking of the reflection in the water.

"Oh my, yes, and the new calf is the cutest thing! I—"

The dull roar of a gun fired far away in the direction of their home, interrupted the girl. She paused an instant, then with a timid cry sprang to her brother's side, and seized his hand.

The report of the rifle was immediately followed by another and then, accompanied by the war-whoops of Indians, fierce and terrible, though a half mile distant, there came the crashing of a number of guns fired together or in quick succession.

Clay's knees seemed to give way, and he could hardly speak as Nellie threw her arms about him in utter terror. Oh, why had he not given alarm? Too late to think of that now, and he felt that flight was all that remained for him—flight to some secluded place where he and Nell might hide. He was terribly frightened, and the overpowering fears of his sister made his situation worse.

What should he do? The war-cries of the Indians came fast and furious now, and his fancy pictured

their painted forms as they howled about the cabin, —setting it on fire, perhaps,—and his mother's terrible danger, their solitary neighbor her only protector.

Like a flash, these thoughts ran through the boy's mind, and he realized what he must do. Not with the courage of burning enthusiasm and excitement, but with that calmer, far greater courage of one who sees his duty and does it, knowing that he runs straight into dreadful danger and faces death at every step, forcing his unwilling feet and hands to do that which his brain and heart declare is right, Clay quickly, gently released himself from Nellie's frightened clasp. With all his resolution he suppressed the quaking of his voice and quivering of his limbs, saying:

"Nell, I'll have to hurry to the house; and you must hide somewhere."

All in a second or two this had taken place, and now, his mind made up, the brave boy lost no further time. The girl still clung with both hands upon his arm, and begged that she be not left alone.

"Be brave now, Sis," continued Clay, though his own voice was shaky, "and run fast as you can. I

know a place where you will be safe till I can come back for you, and I must get to the cabin just as fast as I can or——"

He did not finish the sentence, but with Nellie at his side, raced to the farther end of the clearing, his long-barreled rifle in his hand. A few hundred feet within the woods they came to what appeared to be only a big pile of brush; but bending over, Clay pointed to a low, narrow opening near the ground, among the matted branches, which led into and underneath the heap.

"It's the turkey trap I made last winter," he said. "Crawl in through this little passage and keep quiet, Nell. Quick! and don't cry; no one would ever think to look for you here, and I'll be back just as quick as I can. Things may not be so bad; Joe Rose is a sure shot and brave, and what's more, we don't know that the Indians attacked the cabin, —we're only afraid they have. Good-bye, Nell! now be brave!" the boy concluded, and the girl crept in and back out of sight beneath the brush pile, as many a turkey had done, only to find that it did not know the way out.

With a quick look in all directions, to make sure

no savage had been spying near, Clay started for the cabin at a run. It was easier to be brave now. His courageous spirit and sense of right had mastered. He ran as he never had done before, his sharp eyes making constant observations on all sides.

In her hiding-place in the turkey trap, Nell could no longer hear the clamor of the Indians' horrid cries, except now and then a whoop louder than the rest. She sat on the ground softly crying, covering her face with her hands, and mingled with her sobs, was a little prayer.

CHAPTER III.

HIDE AND SEEK.

As he drew near the little clearing about the cabins, Clay checked his speed, and then, lest unexpectedly he should meet the war party, continued his approach by hurrying cautiously from tree to tree. He no longer heard the yells of the savages, but could not determine what the silence meant—whether they had been repulsed, or whether,—he scarcely dared to think of the greater likelihood, that the fight was over and the Indians were the victors.

In a minute or two he would reach the edge of the clearing and learn the truth. Stealthily he went on, his rifle cocked and ready, though he knew not what he could or would do, if, as he believed was

probable, he should find the cabins surrounded by the savages. He would open fire on them if there were not too many, he was thinking, when a ruddy glare some distance forward arrested his attention.

"They've set fire to the barn!" Clay thought. So was he unconsciously prepared for the greater shock in store for him.

The brightness of the reddish glow grew greater momentarily. Just ahead was a clump of bushes, and stooping down, Clay ran quickly and softly forward. From the protection of the brush he raised his head. In a moment, the horror of what had taken place burst upon him. His own home, the cabin of Mr. Rose and the two barns were burning. From end to end, and from top to bottom the two log houses were wrapped in flames. One barn—that of Mr. Rose—had burned almost to the ground. The other was not so nearly consumed, but the roof had fallen in, and from between the walls of unhewn logs, still standing, the fire and smoke poured out in waves.

No living creature was in sight. Quickly and quietly as they had come, the Indians had gone. Where was his mother? How fared it with her?

A dull, oppressive ache took possession of Clay's heart and brain, benumbing all his faculties. So for several minutes he stood cautiously looking through the leafy branches of the taller bushes about him, while the flames roared and crackled, faster and faster destroying the evidences, which but an hour before, had shown that here in the forest's depths civilized people lived and had their homes.

Again there came to the heart-sick boy a sudden impulse to run fast as he could from the spot—to flee,—somewhere, anywhere—to get Nellie and hurry on and on, maybe to Fort Pitt, or maybe—he knew not whither.

He feared at any moment to see the Indians returning. His certain knowledge that at least one redman had seen him at the creek, and therefore knew of his presence in the vicinity, made it seem most probable that in a little while they would be coming back to find him. But he could not leave the spot until he knew his mother's fate, and he dared not venture into the open or approach nearer to the burning houses.

A light footfall behind him, brought Clay out of his dazed and helpless state of mind with wonderful

rapidity. Instantly he wheeled about, alert and bold, his trembling vanishing.

There stood Nellie. She had caught sight of the burning cabins immediately after seeing her brother, and stood gazing at the flames with frightened, tear-stained eyes. Clay placed his hand upon her shoulder before she noticed that he had observed her, and with a violent little start she looked up in his face, as if to read in his mind the terrible fear she felt, but dared not express. It was of her mother that she was thinking, and yet in the midst of it all, she feared, too, that Clay would scold her for having followed him, and so made haste to say, in scared and choking tones:

"Clay, I just couldn't stay there alone!"

"Never mind, Nell," the boy answered, scarcely above a whisper.

"What shall we do? What shall we do?"

Clay needed some just such grief-laden inquiry to stir him to action. It made him realize the tremendous responsibility resting upon him for the protection of his sister and himself. He knew that in Nell's eyes he was a man. A man's part he must act, and then and there resolved he would act; and

throwing off the stupefying fear which he felt returning, he began to think and plan, quickly and calmly.

"You must be a brave girl, Nell, dear," he said, tenderly. "We must both be brave. It's more than likely that the Indians will come back here looking for us, and they mustn't find us. So you must hide—and stay hid, too—while I try to find out just what has happened, and where those red heathen went. And I'll have to put you somewhere, right quick,—but where? That's the question. Maybe—"

"I will be brave, Clay. I should have stayed in the turkey trap, but I didn't, and—so let me hide in these bushes. I'll go far in among them, and cover myself up with leaves and, honest Injun, I won't stir, not a step, nor even look out, till you come back."

With hasty, cautious glances, this way and that, assuring himself that they were not observed, the boy agreed to this proposal, and in a little while, covering his tracks as best he could to leave no trail, he walked all around the large clump of bushes, pleased to find that even a close examination

did not reveal Nell's hidden form upon the ground among them.

"You're all right; keep perfectly still," he whispered to the girl, then calling all his courage up, stole noiselessly to the edge of the clearing.

The four fires were still burning. From his place behind an oak, in whose shade he had comfortably rested while planting corn a short twenty-four hours before, he looked from end to end of the open space which he and his father and Joe Rose had cut out of the heart of the forest.

Over by the barn, flat on her side, lay Redbird, their cow, dead. Still nearer the almost consumed structure, lay two other similar objects—the oxen, side by side in death, as they ever had been in life. Even in these dark minutes, Clay recalled how, when they were calves, he had broken them to the yoke in faraway Pennsylvania. He could not see whether Mr. Rose's cattle had met a similar fate, their neighbor's barn being at the farther end of the clearing, but he had no doubt all the animals had been killed, and gave the thought no further heed; for his mind was occupied with inquiries concerning his mother and their neighbor.

Tears came to Clay's eyes again and again, but with a manful effort, he put them back and cautiously started to make a circuit of the clearing, to find, if he could, the trail of the savages, and learn the course they had taken. He had proceeded from the southwest to the north side of the open space, when he came upon a fresh trail following an old runway of the deer through the woods. The dry ground was slightly moistened in places by imprints of moccasined feet, wet by mud and water in crossing the low land near this edge of the woods, and other traces of a trail were here and there visible. Anxiously he looked to discover some footprint which might be his mother's; that she might have been taken captive, and not killed, was the poor boy's only hope. He prayed that he would find that this was true, and that God would make it possible for him to rescue her.

But it was in vain that Clay searched for some sign that his mother was with the Indians as, almost hopeless, he hurried on in the direction the savages had taken. He hoped to overtake them and somehow draw near enough to learn if his

mother and Mr. Rose were with them, and how strong the war party was.

Forgetting, in his haste, to continue the caution he had at first observed, Clay narrowly escaped running directly into the arms of a part of the enemy whose path he pursued. He had paused to examine the ground and leaves to make sure of traveling in the right direction, the tracks having now left the old deer path, and glancing up, saw among the trees a hundred yards to his left, two Indians hurrying toward the clearing.

In another moment Clay was squeezing himself against a tree, whose protecting trunk was between himself and the savages. With fast beating heart, he waited until the Indians had passed on. When he felt sure their backs were toward him, he ventured to peep out. The braves were not far from the clearing now, and had stopped and seemed to be speaking to each other. In a few seconds, however, they moved on, but separately, one going to the east, the other to the west.

Clay guessed their intention at once. They meant to travel all around the clearing and come together again at the opposite end; and undoubtedly

they were looking for some one—himself and Nell, the lad had no doubt.

"I could kill you, you—!" Clay muttered, eyeing the Indian, who had started along the westerly edge of the open space, keeping just within the woods, but finding no word to complete his sentence. Indeed, the outraged feelings of the boy made it a strong temptation to steal nearer to the redskin and shoot him down. He would have time to reload his rifle before the other Indian could reach the spot, and he might kill both of them. But he knew not how near the main party of the savages might be, and his better judgment told him to remain quiet.

"I'll follow you, anyway," was Clay's conclusion, and with footsteps light as the petals of a flower, keeping a tree or bushes between himself and the redskin constantly, he approached and kept but a few hundred feet behind the skulking warrior.

Frequently the Indian paused to look about him. He peered into every fallen tree-top, gazed behind every log and tree, and scrutinized all places which might afford a hiding-place, often, also, stepping to the edge of the woods to look up and down the clearing.

As the brave drew nearer the bushes in which Nellie was concealed, Clay watched him with unceasing vigilance. He wondered if Nell would see or hear him, and feared she might mistake the Indian's footsteps for his own, and so reveal herself. He longed to call to her in warning, but he knew that to do so would be a challenge to the savage. To hope for the best, and be prepared for the worst, was his only plan, and he held his rifle in readiness.

At last the Indian stood beside Nell's thicket. He raised himself on tiptoe, looking over the tops of the bushes, and then gazed down among them. Stepping back a pace or two, stealthily as a cat, he stopped and searchingly looked into the brush again. Little he thought how near to death he was at that moment; little he guessed that one sign from him that he had discovered anything of importance there, would have been the signal to have brought a bullet speeding to his heart or brain!

His rifle at his shoulder, his eye taking steady aim, Clay watched, his body hidden by a tree. Again he was tempted to shoot the prowling wretch only for revenge. An unseen power gave him wisdom and he let the temptation pass.

Only for a second did the redskin pause in his stooping attitude, then rose and stepped softly to the clearing again. As he did so, Clay, also, and even more stealthily, moved forward a few paces. Knowing how greatly frightened Nellie would be, he hoped to approach near enough to whisper a word of encouragement, if nothing more; for he meant to play to the end of this game of hide-and-seek, on which the two Indians were so intent; this game in which the prize was life and liberty on the one side, and the other the death or capture of a boy and girl, children of the hated whites.

Disappointment seemed to come to the Indian Clay was following, as he looked once more into the clearing and saw nothing of the object of his search, for he shrugged his shoulders and shook his head. But he hastened on, carefully examining, as before, every possible hiding-place he passed.

Feeling that immediate danger was for the moment over, Clay allowed the savage to get a considerable distance ahead of him, then crept up to the thicket where Nellie was concealed.

"You are all right, Sis; don't answer me, but keep still as ever you can. There are two Indians look-

ing for us—I'm watching them. And don't worry, Nell; I'll be back pretty soon."

As quickly and softly as he had spoken, Clay left the spot and again drew near the savages skulking on ahead of him. A couple of minutes later he caught sight of the other painted brave, who had been searching along the opposite side of the clearing.

Shaking their heads as they came together, the Indians stopped, and for a little time, engaged in conversation. All in a twinkling then, the thought came to Clay that they would now be starting back and that he must act instantly if he hoped to escape discovery.

Even as he hesitated, thinking what was best to do, the savages turned and walked toward him.

CHAPTER IV.

THE NEST IN THE ASH.

While Clay had felt himself to be in no great danger of discovery so long as he exercised due care, while following one Indian, now that two were coming toward him, he was in a very different position. His first thought was to shoot one of the savages and take his chances with the other; but remembering that not only his own, but Nellie's safety depended upon him, and that he must be especially careful for her sake, he resolved not to run the risk of being killed by the second Indian, supposing that he could kill one at a single shot.

A sugar tree of considerable size was between Clay and the warriors, and he crouched behind it, working his way gradually around the trunk as they

came nearer, gauging the location of the Indians by the sounds of their soft footfalls upon the leaves and ground, and so kept himself constantly shielded from view. Suddenly, however, the Indians stopped only a few yards from the boy's place of concealment. For a minute or two they conversed in their own language, enough of which Clay understood to learn their general meaning.

It was of the creek and the natural clearing where the potato-patch was, that the savages were speaking. They should search there, they agreed, and in another moment, greatly to the relief of the boy behind the tree, they turned and set off at a rapid walk in the opposite direction.

Feeling that he could not consider himself and Nellie safe, even for a minute, while these redmen were in the vicinity, Clay followed them at a respectful distance, using the same tactics as before to keep the braves in view, while he himself was sheltered from their sight. Straight to the natural clearing, then to the pool where Clay had seen the painted face reflected, the Indians went, making careful search as they proceeded, but, fortunately, seldom looking behind them. At such times

as the two did chance to look back, Clay had all he could do to escape their vigilance; but he was ever on his guard, and the least pause of the savages sent him hugging a tree or dodging down behind some other object that would screen him, then hardly stirring, scarcely breathing, until the redmen moved on again.

As they crossed the ploughed land, where the potatoes were planted, one of the Indians viciously kicked the hoe Clay had used, still lying as he had dropped it when Nellie had come to him. With a word of remonstrance, the other picked the hoe up, put it over his shoulder and marched on. Coming to the edge of the woods again, the savages debated what course they should pursue, and one pointed to the sun, now just visible through the tops of the trees to the west, to indicate that it was growing late. The other shrugged his shoulders and jerked his head, as if to say, "Yes, it will be dark before long." Turning then, the two braves started in the direction of the clearing where the cabins had stood.

Again Clay found himself in imminent danger, for the savages started back straight toward the fallen tree, behind the upturned roots of which he

was hiding. His situation was the most critical it had yet been. He could not keep moving around the flat bank of roots and earth, as he had circled about the maple, when the Indians had turned and walked toward him before, and no large tree was near to which he could retreat. Every second was bringing the two braves nearer, and he saw but one way out of the trap in which he had carelessly allowed himself to be caught, and that was full of danger. But he must do something, and that quickly, and he chose the plan suggesting itself to him without more delay. The roots of the fallen tree had lifted up a great mass of earth which still clung to them, leaving a broad hole a foot deep at the spot where the tree had stood. Flat on his back in this excavation, Clay lay down. If the Indians passed very near, they would see him, Clay knew; if they did not, he was safe. But they would certainly have discovered him if he remained standing or even crouching down, and of two dangers, he chose the lesser.

Lying still as the dead leaves on the ground about him, the boy heard the Indians approach. Prostrate on his back, he noticed that some slight jar

had loosened tiny particles of the dry earth clinging to the mass of roots above him, and they came trickling down in a steady stream, making, it seemed to Clay, a terrible noise. Soon he could hear the warriors talking, and knew they were almost upon him. If they were searching as carefully now as before, his discovery was inevitable, he was certain, and he pressed the trigger of his rifle harder, and held his breath.

"No use at all hunt any more. Gone—boy and girl, too,—heap far away, long ago," the frightened lad heard one of the Indians say in an odd mixture of the Mingo dialect and English.

"Ugh!" was the answer of the other.

The noise they made among the leaves, as they drew nearer and still nearer, was like the marching of an army, Clay thought; so painfully distinct came the footfalls of the redskins to his ears. The braves could not be more than a few yards distant now, the trembling boy well knew. They had but to glance in his direction and all would be over with him; but he would fight—he could kill one of them! Then he thought the ominous footfalls seemed to grow fainter. Could it be? Were the Indians pass-

ing by without seeing him? Truly they were, for now the sounds of their feet came more and more faintly along the ground and steadily kept receding.

In another minute Clay felt it safe to breathe more naturally; but not until he could no longer hear the retreating footsteps, though he listened with utmost care, did he raise his head. The Indians were not in sight. Quickly he was upon his feet and looked again. He thought he saw the murderous pair a few hundred yards away, moving carelessly among the trees, and at once resumed his pursuit of them.

Without again turning, the redskins went directly to the smoking ruins of the cabins. From just within the woods Clay watched them. Looking upon the awful work of the wretches—the dead cattle and burned buildings,—and thinking of his mother's probable fate, he felt again intense desire to fire upon the braves. They seemed to be searching for any articles of value lying about the premises which might have been overlooked by their companions earlier in the day.

Finding nothing, the Indians once more turned back and entered the woods. Clay had little diffi-

culty to avoid being seen this time, as the two entered the forest a stone's throw to the north of his hiding-place, but he was frightened greatly as he saw the fellows sit down on a log not fifty paces from the thicket where Nellie was hidden. What did it mean? He feared the savages meant to make camp and spend the night just where they were. He wondered if he would be able to catch them asleep and kill both before they awoke.

A score of plans for the deliverance of Nell from the danger in which she was placed, the brave boy made and rejected one after another. Slowly—so very slowly,—the shadows were lengthening; slowly—how very slowly the time was passing. And if the minutes were long to the boy who vigilantly watched and waited, what must they have been to little Nell under her coverlid of leaves, knowing full well that the Indians were near—she could hear them speak—and not knowing where her brother was; fearing he had been killed; fearing that in another moment she would have to give way to her grief and fright, and scream and cry? The tears made zig-zag courses along her temples and fell to the leaves about her ears.

If to the reader, this meager description of that awful day may seem patience-trying, let him think how infinitely longer was the day itself to the most unhappy boy and girl alone in the forest, denied the comfort they might have had in each other's company, while savage men tramped the woods in search of them, and sat themselves down beside the girl's hiding-place at last and waited.

With what feeling of relief Clay saw the Indians finally arise and move away may be likened to that of one who has sat or worked for weeks beside the bed of a loved one who has been very ill, and suddenly finds the crisis passed, the danger over.

Taking one last look about the clearing, the savages strode off in the direction whence they had first returned, and, worn out by the terrible anxiety of the past half hour, and the anguish of the day's events, Clay followed them no more. But the moment the warriors were out of sight, he hurried noiselessly to Nellie's side.

"They're gone, Nell; gone for good, I hope; but don't make any noise."

The little girl rose up at once, and with great, sorrowful eyes looked inquiringly at her brother.

He guessed the question she wished, yet dreaded to ask, and said:

"I don't know much more than you do, Nell—about what has happened. It seems to me that maybe the Indians took mother prisoner, and that maybe she carried on so about us, and all that, you know, that they knew there was some one she was leaving behind, and so sent two greasy rascals back to hunt. I saw them coming, and followed them all around here, and down to the potato patch and back again. They sat down on that log, yonder, and I thought they would never go on again! But don't be scared any more, Nell; in only a little while father will be coming back, and like as not, he will have heard from somebody what has happened, and will bring enough men along with him, that we can follow the Indians up and get mother back again,—and kill a few of 'em, I hope. I'm going to take a careful look all about the cabin—or where it stood—as soon as it gets a little dark, and maybe we can find out just what did happen."

Poor Clay! He would have felt so much better if he himself could have believed the encouraging words he spoke to Nell, but that he could not do.

In his own mind he had no doubt that his mother and Mr. Rose, as well, had been killed, and that it was the savage who had seen him at the creek who had been the means of sending others back to search for, and kill and capture him. They may, or may not, have known of his sister being with him.

With the quick intelligence of a bright girlish mind, Nell realized the dangers her brother had faced in his long game of hide-and-seek with the Indians, and her heart was filled with love and admiration for him. In her own sweet way, she resolved to be brave and kind and help to bear the burden of sorrow and danger they must endure alone until their father came; for surely he would somehow hear of what had happened, and return at once to the spot where their home had been to look for them. Neither brother or sister for a moment doubted this, though they could not have told just how their father was to learn of their situation, alone in the woods.

"We must find a place to stay till father comes," said Clay. "I don't know where—just yet—but I'll find some good place, all right. And you'll have to do the cooking, Nell," he added, with a feeble smile,

to cheer his sister, "but there won't be any dishes to wash."

"We can—"

With a little scream of fright, the girl interrupted herself in the reply she was about to make, as a gaunt, gray wolf trotted up to within a yard or two of where they were sitting. Her cry caused the wolf to halt, then go galloping away with a dismal howl.

"Oh, Clay, he was coming to eat poor dead Dan and Darling," she sorrowfully whispered, referring to the oxen which bore the names the brother and sister had given them as calves.

"I suspect so," the boy answered.

He had risen from their place of concealment in the thicket and was looking anxiously in all directions. Far in the woods he could hear the cries of other wolves and knew they smelled the blood of the slaughtered cattle. By nightfall they would come in large numbers to the spot. He could not afford to try to keep them away. To build a fire large enough to do this would be to attract the Indians, and to shoot them as they came would do the same. Moreover, he had only such bullets and powder as

had chanced to be in his pouch, and there must be no wasting of them. Far too likely was it that he would need every bit of the ammunition for much more important things before he and Nellie were among friends again.

So thinking, Clay turned to his sister once more. She had risen and stood looking sorrowfully toward the smoking timbers of the burned buildings.

"We will have to have something to eat," he said; "even when father comes, he will not be bringing much with him. It seems a terrible pity, Nell, but I guess we will have to get some beef before the wolves get it. The oxen having been shot and killed, the meat will be all right the same as venison that is shot in the same way. But the first thing to do is to fix ourselves a camp. We will have to stay near the clearing and watch every day or father may come and, not finding us, hurry away after the Indians without our seeing him. To stay here right beside the clearing would be too dangerous, so we'd better go into the woods a ways. I was—"

"I know a place, Clay," Nell interrupted suddenly,—"the teeter-totter in the wild grape vines.

Don't you know, no one can see in there among the leaves, but any one inside can see out, just as easy."

"Let's go and look," the brother answered in much the same tone of mingled melancholy and interest, and together the boy and girl hurried quietly through the woods.

West of the main clearing and north of the potato patch they came to a shallow ravine. There, earlier in the spring, they had played one day upon a half-grown ash tree, which, growing from the steep hillside, projected out almost horizontally. Upon a clump of young elms at the foot of the hill the wild grape vines hung in thick profusion, quite hiding the upper portion of the ash which extended between two of the elm trees. Shielded by the vines and leaves, they had found the top of the ash an admirable teeter, and among its branches had built a nest of flexible green vines and sticks, weaving them about the boughs of the tree top in such a way that whether they were sitting or lying, there was no danger of falling.

"We couldn't have done better if we had made the nest on purpose," said Nellie, creeping out on the trunk of the ash.

"We didn't much think we'd ever have to sleep here, though," said Clay; but hearing how doleful his words and voice sounded, he added quite cheerily: "I'm ever so glad you thought of this place, Nell; I just didn't know what we were to do."

Her brother's praise always pleased the little girl, and his words pleased her now. For a moment she forgot the great misfortune they had suffered—forgot that she might never again see the gentle mother she so dearly loved—and as Clay sat down beside her in the tree-top nest, his rifle across his knees, she beamed upon him a happy, loving smile. All too quickly her brief bit of happiness vanished. The sun was nearly down now, and a chorus of wolfish howls burst on the air in the direction of the clearing.

CHAPTER V.

GRAY WOLVES.

"Just as you said a while ago, Nell, no one passing by, though ever so near, could see in among these thick vines and leaves."

Like a diplomat, Clay thus spoke to pave the way for other words he feared Nellie would not like. Then he continued: "And you'll be all right here while I go to the—" cabin, was the word the boy intended to say, but he changed it to "clearing."

"You'll come right back, Clay, and not go following after those Indians again?"

"Yep, in about three wiggles of a lamb's tail you'll hear me whistle like a quail, Sis, and that will be the sign that I'm coming. So don't be scared if you hear footsteps after that, and if you should hear

some one and not hear any whistle, just keep quiet as ever you can, and no one will so much as guess that you are here."

Clay was already on his feet, and answering his sister's low good-bye, balanced himself with his rifle and trotted nimbly down the tree trunk to the hillside, his moccasins helping to give him a safe footing.

Nellie curled herself up in the leafy nest when left alone, and with a profusion of tears, cried softly and quietly. She was so frightened, so hungry, so filled with sorrow, she thought her heart was almost breaking. She knew her brother had gone to get meat, and to find anything he could about the clearing, which might make them less uncomfortable, but like the little girl-woman she was, wondered why he could not have taken her with him, and in a gentle, uncomplaining sort of way, blamed him for leaving her alone. What if something should happen to her—the wolves scent out her hiding place, or some Indian who may have been slyly watching, carry her off or murder her, maybe? Clay would be sorry then and wish he had said, "You

must go with me, Nell; it isn't safe for you to stay alone."

Then she thought of her mother again and wished she were with her, even though they both were bound hand and foot, as she imagined her mother to be, in some Indian camp in the woods, at this very moment.

But the thoughts of the young are quick to change, flying from one subject to another, as bees from the lilacs to the roses, and so Nell's thoughts came at last to the immediate future, and she fell to making plans for the expansion and improvement of the house in the tree-top, where they must live for the present, at least. Further up on the trunk of the ash, she thought, she and Clay might easily build another large nest with vines and the boughs closely woven together, and covered with leaves, making a roof which would keep out the rain and wind. Then they would have one room for a kitchen and sitting-room and another which would be the bedroom and parlor. Maybe Clay would take her to the ruins of the cabin, next day, too, and she could find some dishes, which, though they might be broken, or melted, if of pewter, as many

of their best table things were, would still do very nicely for a playhouse.

Not because she was enough of a philosopher to know that it is always best and pleasantest to think of the sunny side of life's cares and problems, but because she found real comfort in these plans for really living in a playhouse and became much interested in them. Nell forgot, for a time, the day's misfortunes, and, though it was quite dark now, she scarcely noticed the howling of the wolves in the distance, or thought once more of the danger Clay was facing. Even when two creatures whose gleaming eyes she caught sight of for a moment in the darkness went swiftly past in full cry, only a little distance away in the semi-darkness, anxious to join their bloodthirsty companions about the dead cattle in the clearing, she gave them scarcely a second thought.

Without much trouble, for he was well acquainted with the woods for a couple of miles in all directions from their forest home, Clay soon reached the clearing. He looked all about before emerging from the cover of the trees, not at all surprised to see that he was not alone. Snarls and frequently howls and a

patter of wolfish feet, told him that on all sides the fierce dogs of the forest were only waiting for denser darkness or some bold leader to begin a dreadful feast upon the bodies of the cow and oxen.

Clay had seen so many wolves that he scarcely thought to be afraid of them, and being satisfied that no foes more dangerous were in the vicinity, he looked again to the priming of his rifle, drew his sheath knife, which, like many pioneer boys, he constantly carried, and marched boldly to his task. With a heavy heart, indeed, he cut deeply into the throat of one of the oxen,—the one he called Dan—and felt the blood, still warm, begin to flow. The heart had long since ceased beating, however, and the crimson stream was sluggish. Well as he could, in the fading light, Clay hurried with his task of skinning the ox enough that he would be able to cut off considerable portions of the meat.

At last, he obtained as much as he wished to carry, but even before he had done so, the wolves had fallen upon the body of Redbird, not far away, and were tearing it to pieces. How savage they were! And now as a pair from the hungry pack came toward him, greedy to begin on the other ani-

mals, Clay for the first time felt afraid of the gaunt, threatening creatures.

The wolves gave the boy little attention, however, but when he had gone, taking the meat he wished to save to hang it in a portion of the ox's skin out of reach on the limb of a tree, they leaped viciously upon the bodies of Dan and Darling, snapping at one another, snarling, howling, and making the woods ring with their discordant clamor.

Soon Clay was ready to begin the task he most dreaded, though he had in it a keen interest—that of searching for some sign which would tell the result of the attack upon the cabin. He could give some time to this search, now, whereas if he had given it attention first, the wolves would have left no meat for him.

Deep in the boy's heart was a dreadful fear which he had felt all afternoon, that among the charred ruins of the cabin, he would find evidence which could leave no room to doubt that his mother had been slain. How forlorn, how wretched and altogether miserable he felt, as in the light of the great white moon, now rising, he guardedly approached the heap of ashes and the still smoking, half-burned

logs, where but that morning his home had been! In vain, however, were all his investigations. He found that he could not go in among the cabin's ruins, there were still so many live coals, and going to the similar heart-breaking heap which marked the spot where Joseph Rose's house had stood, he found the situation the same. It was the same where the barns had been,—nothing that he could see afforded any information. There were only the smoldering embers, only the plants and grass, scorched and withered by the heat of the flames, and something indescribably lonely and depressing in the air about them all. There was something terrible, too, even in the odors from the half-burned vegetation and the ashes, though they mingled with the sweet scent of the spring flowers and the woods. The whole atmosphere seemed haunted by the awful events of the day. And these things impressed themselves deeply upon Clay's heart and mind, and, together with the fearful noises the wolves were making scarcely a stone's throw from him, caused the poor boy most bitter heart-ache and wretchedness.

For a little while he sat upon a stump and pon-

dered what he should do. He longed to go to Nell and with her start at once for the river settlements or Fort Pitt. But he could not go until his father returned, he told himself over and over again, and once more decided that to remain in hiding and watch and wait, was the best plan he could pursue.

"Poor Nell!" Clay mused, and shouldering his rifle, gave the moonlight-flooded clearing one hasty glance, and started to return to her. He noticed as he passed them, that the number of wolves seemed greater, though they were less noisy since many had eaten their fill and now stood or lay nearby, licking their bloody feet and chops. In the moonlight he could see them all quite clearly, and somehow the sight of their savage contentment after the feast which had come to them at such enormous cost to him, made the boy hate the creatures. Scarcely could he resist the temptation to fire among them. To do so would but put himself in danger from the Indians, if any were within hearing, however, and surely frighten Nell, who would hear the discharge of the rifle; and so passing by a few rods to one side of the animals, he made his way to the tree in which the beef was hung.

As Clay threw the meat over his shoulder, he noticed a pair of glaring, green eyes in the darkness, which was much thicker and blacker, now that he was among the trees, but thinking it was but one more hungry wolf come to join the pack, he started on. Footfalls behind him attracted his attention soon, however. and he turned to see the gleaming eye-balls quite close to him, and near them still another pair.

"Get out of this!" he cried in a low, sharp tone, and jumped toward the creatures to frighten them. They leaped aside but did not retreat as he had expected.

"Those fellows will bear pretty close watching," was Clay's mental comment, as, considerably frightened, he quickened his steps.

Scarcely could he see his way among the trees and brush, and as he turned again to look at the wolves following closer and closer behind him, he tripped on a limb and fell. Instantly the wild dogs leaped toward him, and had he not been able to rise no less quickly and cry out at them, he would have risen never more. He felt the hot mouth of one of the brutes close to his face. Clubbing his rifle, as

the wolves moved back but a few feet, he leaped toward them, observing as he did so, that their number was now increased to four.

"It's the fresh meat and the smell of blood upon my hands and clothes. These four must have sniffed me out as they were going toward the others in the clearing," Clay told himself, quickly picking up his burden and starting on, this time at a run.

The very act of his running from them, made the wolves bolder, and in a half minute they were snapping and growling close to the boy's heels. That he dared not risk falling again, Clay well knew; that he might throw to the beasts the meat he carried and so readily escape, he also knew. But he felt that he could not afford to do this, as the problem of getting enough for Nell and himself to eat was one of no small importance.

"Take that, you brute!"

Clay dropped the burden of beef, and wheeling suddenly, dealt the nearest wolf a stinging blow with his rifle barrel. With a yelp of pain the creature leaped toward the boy. Clay stumbled and nearly fell, but managed to strike the wolf a second time, and quickly recovering his balance, stood al-

most astride the meat he meant to save, striking out with his rifle whenever a pair of eyes came within reach.

Presently the plucky lad was able to pick up his beef and, carrying it in one hand, his rifle in the other, he backed slowly away, closely followed by the yellow-green eyes; there were five pairs of them now. He thought he must be drawing near Nell's hiding-place and softly whistled. No answer came.

Quite frightened by this, and fearing he might have gone out of his course in the darkness, he glanced about and was still more scared to see that the wolves were scattering out at either side of him as if to hem him in.

"Looks as if they must have the meat or I must climb a tree!" Clay ejaculated grimly, but he tried again the signal he had told Nell he would use,—a little louder than before. In answer to his low, clear "Bob White!" there came like a trembling echo, the same "Bob White!" gently whistled in answer.

"Good! Good for you, Nell! Now, then, you varmints, scatter!" Clay cried, his voice increasing in vehemence with each word, and he plunged right

and left toward the wolves, brandishing his heavy rifle bravely.

As the wolves for a second leaped back, the daring boy quickly turned and ran, and by the time the creatures had closed around him again, he was very near the foot of the ash. Again he leaped toward the wolves, but only one or two retreated, and with a deep-voiced howl and snarl, one ferocious fellow met the lad half way.

Clay struck the wolf a smart blow over the head with his rifle barrel, but still the brute advanced, rising on its hind feet as if to leap upon him.

A scared little cry from the tree-top told Clay that Nellie knew his danger and, also, that he was very near their refuge. Steadily backing away, he kept the leader of the hungry pack at bay with his gun, though his arm felt ready to break from the labor of swinging the heavy, long-barreled weapon, and at last found himself beside the sloping trunk of the tree.

"Slip out and get the beef I've brought, Nell," Clay called, but even as he spoke, the foremost wolf gave a strong leap forward, and only by good fortune was he able to duck down in time to escape.

As it was, the wolf went skimming over his head, and, missing its footing, rolled nearly to the foot of the hill.

Her eyes, accustomed to the darkness, enabled Nell to creep down the ash. Before another of the fierce creatures could come within reach, Clay passed the skin and the beef in it up to the girl, and then with both arms free, turned just in time to meet again the approach of the savage beast which had leaped over him.

CHAPTER VI.

AMID THE CABIN'S ASHES.

It may be that Clay acted unwisely in not throwing some portions of the meat he carried to the wolves. By so doing, he could have gained enough time to have escaped. It was not that he did not think of this; but it was not his disposition to yield an inch if he felt that he was right. Maybe it was stubbornness in this instance, but certain it is that, being opposed, he fought the harder.

The trouble and very great danger which the lad might have avoided by resorting to stratagem were soon upon him. For now, as he turned to face the foamy-jawed animal, which had first attacked him, he was so exhausted that, swinging his rifle around to beat the enemy off, the blow lacked force. He

struck the wolf upon the shoulder instead of on the head, and in another moment was sprawling on his back, the wolf atop of him, its teeth sinking deep in his left arm.

With a frantic cry, Clay dropped his rifle, and with both hands, seized the wolf by the throat; but his efforts to release his arm in this way were well-nigh as useless as a baby's would have been. The other wolves closed in around the struggling boy and beast, their jaws snapping like traps of steel, their eyes gleaming greedily as they leaped hither and thither, looking for a chance to join in the battle.

Quickly abandoning his attempt to break the wolf's hold, Clay with his free right hand felt for his knife. He drew the blade from his belt and stabbed again and again at the shaggy shoulder close to his face. He but increased the rage of the furious brute, whose sharp claws were now tearing through his clothing, lacerating his chest and sides, the more with every movement.

"Boo! Scat! Oh, you—"

Nell came to the rescue, her shrill, scared voice raised to a high pitch, knowing not what she said,

while she pounded at the wolves with a long pole.

No sooner had the little girl hastened from the tree-top than she discovered Clay's predicament, and only for a second did she pause. Her anger at the wolves and her excitement overcame her fears. She remembered a pole leaning against a tree near their nest, which Clay had used as a fishing rod. Seizing it, she ran to her brother's aid.

As he heard Nell's shouts, Clay increased the vigor of his thrusts at the wolf still clutching his arm. He feared momentarily to hear a scream which would tell him that his sister had been borne down by the other animals, and in a burst of utter desperation, he at last drove the knife hilt deep through the throat of the beast astride him, and gave the blade a strong downward pull. He heard the ripping sound as the thick skin was cut, and the hot blood spurted upon his face and neck.

The wolf retained its hold, but not for long. The pressure of the jaws upon the boy's arm grew less and less, and in a few seconds was removed. Straightening out its neck, the wounded beast gave one short howl and fell, quivering, in death's clutches.

Clay never knew just how he managed to stagger to his feet and reach the tree-top; but Nell knew, for it was her hand which guided him to their haven. One hand in his, she held in her other the fishing pole, its larger end upon the ground, and so steadied herself as they walked out and up the ash's trunk.

"I guess I'm pretty near played out," Clay panted, crawling down in the nest of leaves.

"O-oh-h!" came in a half-sob from his sister, and straightway she began to cry; she could not have told why.

The hungry howls were quieted. The four remaining wolves were feeding on the body of their dead leader. Their greedy jaws and their snarls were hideous to hear.

"Never mind, Sis; I ain't much hurt, I guess," said Clay, in comforting tones, when he caught his breath. "You're a mighty brave girl, that's what you are, and—here, now, can you see to cut a piece out of my sleeve, and tie around my arm? Thunderation, but it hurts! But it will be all right pretty soon. We'll both be all right when morning comes,

and we can get fixed up and have something to eat —if those pesky Indians don't come back."

The darkness among the branches and vines which sheltered their retreat was so great, Nell could only feel her way as she cut off the tattered sleeve of her brother's homespun woolen shirt, and with his help, securely bound up the ugly wound on his arm. She was still gently crying but no word of complaint or distress escaped her.

"I'm only afraid those howling things will hang around here till morning," Clay went on, referring to the wolves; "but they'll hardly try to get out on the tree, and if they do, we can drive 'em back with the fishing pole. Lucky that you thought of this nest, Nell. We'd be in a pretty fix if we were camped on the ground!"

So the minutes passed. As Clay had feared, the wolves still remained about the place after cleaning the bones of their less fortunate companion. They sniffed the air and howled, and gathered in the valley below the tree-top nest to lick up the particles of blood dripped down from the meat which had cost so dearly; but they made no bolder attempt to reach the boy and girl above them. Other wolves joined

them during the night, but they had come from the skeletons of the cattle in the clearing, and were too well fed to make trouble.

All night, however, these and other beasts were raising their discordant voices far and near. Some of them must have traveled a score of miles, Clay thought, attracted by the cries of their fellows as from one to another far through the forest rang the fierce, short howls and longer notes which seemed to tell all their kind of the scent of fresh blood in the air.

As the hours dragged slowly on, both Clay and Nell suffered from the cold. The girl curled herself up, her head on her brother's lap, and tried to sleep; but it was of no use, and at last she sat up and began talking of the plans she had made for adding to their leafy home, if they remained there a few days.

Though weary and suffering, Clay had no thought of closing his eyes, and his sister's conversation was pleasant to him. He praised her for her bright ideas for the improvement of their quarters, and suggested further, that with flat stones and earth from the little brook in the valley, they might make a

safe place for the building of a fire right in the tree-top and so cook their meat there.

The voices of the birds told of the coming of another day long before Nell or Clay could see from their hiding-place that the dawn was in sight; but rapidly from that time on the darkness disappeared and with it went the wolves, silently as the night itself.

When it was fairly daylight, Clay, benumbed and cold, crawled out upon the ash and so to the ground. Calling good-bye to his sister, he hurried away to the clearing to obtain some coals of fire. He might have started a blaze by flashing powder with his flintlock rifle, but if he could find some embers still smoldering in the ruins of the cabins or barns, that was a cheaper and quicker way.

The silent, empty clearing with the bones of the cattle scattered about, the scorched garden and awful air of desolation over all, gave the lad a most uncomfortable feeling as he reached the spot, but he did not pause to think how awful it all was, nor look about as he had done the night before. Satisfied that no one was prowling near, he collected on the metal portions of a shovel which he found in the

ashes of the barn, enough live coals from a log which still burned, to start a fire at their retreat, and hurried back to Nellie.

The little girl, with pluck and spirit had already been to the tiny brook in the ravine, over which their nest was suspended, to wash her face and hands, and Clay found her, his big knife in hand, cutting slices of the beef he had saved, preparatory to broiling them.

"Now I must find some real dry wood, so as to make as little smoke as possible, and we will soon have breakfast," he told his sister; and in a couple of minutes, he had started a bright little blaze with some bits of dry branches from a fallen beech.

Nell cut and trimmed some green, forked sticks, and by the time the fire had made a hot bed of coals, Clay joined her, and fastening slices of the meat on these spits, they broiled them quite nicely. True, a part of their breakfast was under-done and a part was decidedly over-done, but when one has had nothing to eat for twenty-four hours, he is not likely to find fault with the cooking, especially if the cook happens to be himself.

"'Twouldn't be bad at all, if we had some salt,"

said Clay, eating a somewhat burned piece of beef from one hand, while with the other he was broiling another slice.

"Really, Clay, mine is just good," Nell answered with hopeful emphasis. "But just the minute you've had enough, you must get yourself all washed up and let me tie a new cloth on your arm. My, how scratched up you are! And you ought to have washed before eating breakfast. What would mother say?"

When the breakfast was over, Nell, using one of her sunbonnet strings, stretched out to its full width neatly bandaged Clay's most serious wound, after it had been carefully washed at the little brook. And then, having placed their shovel of fire in a crevice of a rocky ledge of the ravine, that its smoke might not be noticed, the brother and sister went together to the spot where their home had been.

"We can hardly hope to see papa to-day," said Clay, "but I believe he may come by to-morrow. And yet, we mustn't count on it; because, don't you see, we would be so much the more disappointed if he didn't come."

Nell acquiesced in this bit of philosophy by say-

ing they must make the best of their plight; that every day was pleasant if one only thought so, and she would try so hard! Indeed, had it not been for her fears for their mother's safety, the little girl would have been quite content to know that their father would not come for several days, so interested had she become in her plans for living in a playhouse. Poor girl! she little thought then how they would wait and wait in vain for their father's coming.

Clay had not visited the ruins of the cabin when he went for coals with which to start the fire, and as he now marched up to the spot, Nell at his side, he decided to make the search he felt that he must make among the ashes of their home. Tears came to the girl's eyes time and again, try as she would to hold them back, but she watched interestedly all that her brother did. Finding the ashes cool enough so that he could walk among them, Clay procured a stick and stirred about among the dead coals and fine gray dust as he advanced from one side to another of the spot the cabin had occupied.

"What are you hunting, Clay?" Nell asked at length.

The boy was near the spot where the cabin door had been. Even as his sister spoke his stick moved from the ashes which covered it a large bone.

"See how the wolves scattered the skeletons of poor old Dan and Darling," he said, pointing away and causing Nell to look in the direction of the barn. While she did so, he quickly searched further for other bones among the ruins. There was something sacred about the ghastly relic he had moved, and now he used his hands in groping about for more. Almost immediately he found a skull—a human skull, and barely suppressed a cry of grief and pain.

"Why, what's that, Clay?" the girl cried.

"Nothing—nothing, much," the lad managed to answer, and again called his sister's attention to something in another part of the clearing that she might not see from her place on a stump a few yards distant, the discovery he had made.

It was best that she should not know, Clay told himself; but he knew—knew positively now, that either his mother or Joseph Rose had been killed. He could not tell which, but a man's ability to escape would be greater than a woman's, and far too

probable was it that his mother,—and, maybe, their neighbor as well, had been slain.

Yielding to a feeling of fear and dread, which came over him, Clay hurried out of the ashes; but his pale face and strange expression caused Nell to cry out as she saw him:

"Clay Castle, what on earth's the matter? You look like a—a ghost!"

Th boy did not answer, save with a poor attempt at a smile; and then he said:

"I don't think we had better stay out here in the clearing, in plain sight from every side, Nell. We'll see if we can find anything of use to us, and hurry back to the tree."

About the chimney of the cabin, most of which was still standing, the brother and sister discovered a kettle and frying pan which had not been greatly damaged. All the pewter dishes and spoons, remnants of which they found, were completely ruined, however. Pieces of earthen dishes they picked up near the chimney, the cupboard having been close beside the fireplace, and some of these they would be able to use.

The most valued discovery of all, however, was

a tightly covered earthen jar in which salt had been kept, which, though badly cracked, was not broken, its contents being in good condition.

"Of course all the bed clothes burned up," Nellie lamented; "and, Clay, I nearly froze last night."

"I know where the carpet is that mother kept put away; but she had taken it out to air," the boy answered. "That would be a good thing to have."

"Oh, yes, I know!" was the reply, and the sister ran to the foot of the little garden and gathered up the one short breadth of rag carpet which had been among the family's luxuries—not to be used except on special occasions.

With hands full of their strange collection of damaged kitchen utensils and with the little roll of carpet under Clay's arm, the brother and sister hastened into the woods and to their bird-like home.

CHAPTER VII.

STRANGE FOOTSTEPS.

Where to put their possessions when they had reached the tree-top was a problem. The great Indian trail from Fort Pitt to the west was not far away, and roving savages, wandering from their path, in search of game, might at any time pass very near. The sight of a kettle or other sign of civilization would be enough to cause them to make a thorough search. And Clay reasoned that if no one suspected that they were there, he and Nell might remain in their nest for weeks or months without danger of being discovered.

"I'll tell you what we'll have to do, Sis," he said, "and that is, build on that addition to the house, you planned, right away. We need an ax the

worst kind of a way, to cut some poles for the floor, and I believe I can find one at Mr. Rose's wood-pile. He most always left his ax under a log there."

"I will go look for it," Nell suggested, but her brother did not, or would not hear. He told her to remain in the tree-top until she heard his "Bob White" whistle upon his return, and hurried away to the clearing again.

Nell could not quite understand why she must remain in hiding when her brother was not with her, though he had explained that, as he must always have his rifle with him, she could not do the least thing to protect or defend herself if an Indian or some wild beast should chance to find her. She wished very much to be busying herself washing the broken dishes at the brook. With an effort, however, she resisted the temptation to leave her hiding-place, and was soon glad that she had done so.

Clay had been gone more than an hour, his sister thought, though it was really not half that long, and she was becoming very impatient for his return, when a shuffling sound of footsteps came to her ears. Remembering her brother's caution to

remain quiet until she heard his whistle, Nell made no sound, but listened attentively.

"It is queer," she thought; "Clay would not come that way!"

For the noise she heard was in the ravine below, some distance away. The thought that it was not Clay alarmed her and she dared not look out. Steadily the footfalls continued. She could hear some one pushing through the bushes.

"Maybe it's a bear," was the girl's next thought! But she was confident in her innermost heart that the footsteps were those of a human being. In a little while the noises grew less distinct and soon she heard them no more. Still Clay did not come, and, deeply anxious, Nell scarcely breathed, lest she be heard and discovered.

Having reached the clearing, Clay improved the opportunity to search among the ruins of Mr. Rose's cabin, which he had not done before, for any evidence he might find that their neighbor had been killed and his body consumed in the flames of his own house. He found nothing, and was glad, indeed, that he did not. Either Mr. Rose or his mother he now believed, had escaped death; but

which, he could not tell, and greatly fearing his mother was dead, he indulged in a brief, bitter cry, —a thing he would not have done in Nell's presence.

Under a pile of short cuts of logs which Mr. Rose had chopped for his fireplace, Clay found the ax he sought. In his search in and about the ruins of their neighbor's cabin, he also found a steel bear trap and an iron mold and ladle with which bullets were made, and a quantity of lead, melted into a fantastic shape, but capable of being re-melted, and therefore not injured.

Taking his new possessions with him, the boy returned to the tree-top, whistling the signal as he approached.

The sound was a most welcome one indeed in Nellie's ears, and she promptly answered. In another minute she was telling all about the mysterious footsteps she had heard. The girl was certain she had not been mistaken, and so emphatically declared so, that her brother was sorry he had suggested that such might have been the case. But she had to admit that it was possible a wolf or bear or even a deer had made the noise.

Clay went for a brief search along the valley, but

found nothing by which he could determine what it was that had frightened Nell, and so returning to the nest, he began the work of improving their home.

With strong, pliable poles and boughs and tough green vines, he wove a basket-like net work among the limbs of the ash, the trunk of which, of course, supported the floor. The latter he built of the strongest portions of the poles he cut, saving the more slender parts for the sides and ends of the little house.

"We'll have to have a window, too, Nell," the boy declared, as they both worked industriously, "but we'll let it go for now, and get some dinner. What had we better have, chicken pie, or apple dumplings?"

Her brother's perfectly serious manner made the little girl laugh, but she said:

"Clay, why can't we have fish? We have salt, now, and a frying pan, and they'll be so good!"

"The salt and the frying pan or the fish?" the boy asked, smiling, but he was thinking how he could catch some fish. There were plenty of them in the creek not far away.

"We could catch them in our hands," Nell went on, as if reading Clay's thoughts.

"We can do it quicker with a hook," was the reply, and from his pocket Clay drew forth both hook and line. "I had forgotten I had them, till my eye fell on my fish pole, here, then I remembered that I took the line off for papa the night he and Joe Rose were going to the river; and then when they didn't go, I forgot to put it away. So that's one thing that ain't stolen or burned up, and we'll have fish for dinner as sure as the world."

To obtain bait was an easy matter, for there were white grubs in almost every old log, and angle worms, too, in the ploughed ground of the potato patch. Nevertheless, Clay used much caution in hunting for the wood grubs, not to break up and scatter the decayed wood in a way that would attract notice if Indians should chance to pass, and when he and Nell went to the potato patch, he closely inspected the natural clearing before entering it.

The creek was near this clearing and one of its tributaries was the tiny brook running through the ravine over which their ash tree leaned. The water

was soon reached, therefore, and screened by some bushes, that he might see and not be seen, Clay cast in his line. Nell sat nearby busily fanning the mosquitoes from her face, ready to string the fish. She had not long to wait.

"Here's a sucker," Clay quietly announced, and swinging his line shoreward, displayed a squirming fish upon the hook. "Just big enough so that it isn't quite all bones," he said. "Panther Dilly says that when the Lord first made the fish, there were a lot of bones left, so they were done up in bunches and thrown into the creeks and rivers, and called suckers. Now I'll catch a nice punkin seed; they're the best eating."

True to his promise, as good fortune had it, Clay soon landed a fish of the size, and much the same shape as his hand—a species of the bass tribe.

"Catch another punkin seed," Nell urged, laughing, but like a wise boy, Clay only answered that he would see about it.

In less than an hour, a half dozen suckers, three "punkin seeds," or sun-fish, and a horned-ace were on the string Nell was keeping and the brother and sister turned homeward—toward the nest in the

trees—the only home they had. The fish were soon dressed, soon cooked, and soon eaten, and to the owners of fresh-air appetites, could not have tasted better. Then the tiny fire was allowed to die down and was put away again, and work on the house was resumed.

"We could get along ever so much faster, if we didn't have to be so careful not to scatter too many chips and leaves and things around," said Clay, as with one sweep of the ax he cut a little sapling off so close to the roots that the stump was scarcely visible. And so quietly did both he and Nell work, too, that they would not have been heard at any great distance, while their own ears were ever open to catch any unusual sound. From hour to hour, they hoped, as well, that they might hear their father calling them.

As the house in the ash neared completion, it presented a really snug and comfortable appearance. No larger than a modern store box was the new portion which was covered over, and its sides and one end were enclosed except for the hole, by courtesy called a window; but when a few armfuls of green twigs, the leaves still clinging to them,

had been placed on its floor, and over these dry leaves had been spread, a comfortable bed was the result. True, a bit of rag carpet was the only covering in sight, but for warm weather it was quite enough, and pioneer boys and their sisters were not accustomed to fancy-work quilts and soft blankets.

The older portion of the nest—the part originally built like a large bird's nest and nothing more, was so improved, that at one side there was a seat and on the opposite side a little platform, so enclosed, that if a small fire were built there, it would not readily be seen by any one passing. Beside the spot to be used as a little fireplace was room, on one side, for a pile of fine, dry wood, and on the other, for the frying pan, kettle and dishes. The precious jar of salt was more carefully stored in the roofed-over part of the nest.

"I'd be so happy, Clay, if—" Nell finished the sentence with a sorrowful little sigh. She had enjoyed the work of the day, but now, as it was nearly completed, and the night coming on again, she found time for other thoughts, and they were not pleasant ones.

Clay brightened her sweet face at once, however,

by asking what she would have for supper, and she answered by saying it must be beef; that they must use the meat at once, or it would be spoiled.

The remnant of shovel and the few live coals upon it were carried into the tree, therefore, and while the south wind rocked the ash gently up and down, and from side to side—while the sun was sinking low, and the twilight gloom gathering in the forest—the lonely boy and girl cooked and ate their supper in a home such as few civilized people have ever lived in.

The walls of green sticks, and vines, and leaves, which enclosed the platform supporting the shovel and the fire upon it, were high enough to keep the wind away from the bed of coals, and putting on some coarse sticks of dry wood and covering them over with ashes and dry earth, Clay said he thought the fire would keep there as well as in the sheltered crevice of the ledge where it had been before. It was nearly dark now, and he hurried away to take another look about the clearing in hope that he might find their father.

Nell retired to the "bedroom and parlor, all in one," as she described the newer portion of their

home, and waited. It was not probable that Clay would find their father; it was really not yet time to look for him, she told herself as she sat alone. Thus her disappointment was not great when her brother returned, saying he had seen no one, and that all was quiet about the clearing save for some wolves gathering again to fight over the scattered bones of the cattle.

When the night had fairly come, and the darkness was so complete that, accustomed to the gloom as their eyes were, Clay and Nellie could see the trees about them only indistinctly, their leafy branches looking like solid walls of black, save here and there, where the moonbeams stole through, to go to bed was the only thing that remained for them. Nell took off her moccasins, and advised Clay to do the same, but boy-fashion, he lay down in all his clothing, even to his hat. His sister braided her hair anew, and then with a sigh for the damage which must be done her dress of blue-dyed home-spun by sleeping in it, whispered a little prayer, then also crept under the carpet upon their bed of leaves.

In the clearing the wolves were howling hungrily

and the wind made mournful music in the branches overhead. The frogs were waking the echoes in the direction of the creek, and a lone screech-owl screamed, somewhere off toward the potato patch. But in the midst of all this, Nell soon fell fast asleep. Her brother's presence made her security complete she believed, and her greatest fear was that she would dream of the footsteps which that day had frightened her.

Clay could not lose himself in dreamland so easily. Again and again he tried to determine his mother's probable fate, what would befall her if she had been taken captive, and whether she had been made a prisoner or killed. Somehow he could not accept the conclusion the evidence of his discoveries pointed out so positively; that he would see her face and hear her gentle voice never again.

CHAPTER VIII.

A REMARKABLE DISCOVERY.

Clay did fall asleep at last, but troubled dreams came to him, notwithstanding his great fatigue, and sometime later, he thought it must be past midnight, he was awakened by the howling of wolves directly beneath the nest. He raised himself up to find Nell wide awake and sitting up.

"Oh, dear! I am so glad you waked up, Clay," the girl said. "Only a minute ago I saw two eyes looking straight at me from out on the tree. I thought a wolf or something was coming right up into our house!"

"I guess not," the boy answered, but he was quite disturbed by the information. He knew that the incline of the ash's trunk was not so great but

a wolf could walk up on it with ease and it would not be remarkable if one of the fierce creatures were to attempt it.

"I'll tell you what, though, Nell," he said, "I'll set that bear trap and put it half way up on the tree to-morrow night. Then we'll see if we have company without knowing it!"

For the remainder of the night, however, Clay kept himself awake and watched. Only once did he have cause for fear and on that occasion the wolf which had started to walk out on the tree bounded away as he threw a stick of firewood. At dawn, all the wolves departed and the warmth under the carpet helped Clay again to go to sleep, until Nell called him, saying the sun was high in the sky.

"I do so need a comb," the little girl said, when her brother had come up from the brook, his hands and face but partially dried upon some leaves, after their washing; "but I have my apron to wipe my hands on; I guess we will have to make a towel of it for both of us."

"I'll whittle out a comb for you," Clay promised, and during the day he did contrive a coarse-toothed affair that answered his sister's purpose fairly well.

In return, she gave him the remaining string of her sun-bonnet as a bandage for his arm, while she washed and dried the string that had been similarly used the day before. The wound caused Clay not a little pain, he had used his muscles so freely in the work of the previous day, but he did not doubt it would heal and give him no permanent trouble.

After a cautious trip to the clearing together, Clay and Nell gave the remainder of the morning to further work upon their house, and toward noon again prepared to go fishing. At the pool they had visited the day before, however, success did not attend them. Only one bite did Clay get, and failed that time to land his fish.

"It's strange," he said, "but I'll tell you, Sis, we'll go down stream to some of the shallow places where it is wider and there's more sunshine and I'll bet we can snare some pickerel."

As they walked along the bushy bank, and came presently to a more open space in the forest, Nell made a delightful discovery—wild strawberry vines, some in blossom and some bearing fruit, which would soon be ripe. She stooped to search,

hoping to find some ripe berries, maybe, although she knew it was likely too early.

Clay rejoiced in the discovery, but did not trouble himself to look among the vines. Telling Nell it was no use;—that they must come again in a week or two,—and wondering where they would be by that time, he started on. He passed part way around a little thicket of hickory sprouts, then suddenly stopped, frightened, and wondering, as on some sumac bushes, only a few feet away, he saw spread out, as if to dry, a garment of white with ruffled cuffs and fancy collar, and beside it a pair of fine blue stockings.

"Shillings and sixpence!" the boy exclaimed beneath his breath. "What's that?"

Nell was at his side now, and Clay did not need to point out the cause of his surprise. Just as he had done, and with even greater astonishment she made the discovery.

Little wonder that the girl drew back and seized her brother's arm. To see in the depths of the forest, miles and miles from the habitation of any white person save themselves, such unusual evidence of the presence of some one of their own kind was

startling enough.

"Now I wonder whose they are and where he is! They're a man's clothes," Clay whispered, more boldly than he felt—"and no backwoodsman's either!"

"Come away, Clay! Oh, come!" Nell urged, but the boy did not move.

"Nell," he said, after thinking for a few seconds, "you stay right here, down behind this brush, and I'll spy around some."

The girl was about to protest, but seeing how earnest her brother was, did as he asked, while the boy went around the hickories and to the sumac bushes. Examining the shirt and stockings at close range, he decided by their size and general appearance that they probably belonged to some young man, and one probably from the Virginia settlements or the east. Clothing of such texture and make was seldom seen west of the Ohio river, or west of the Alleghenies, for that matter.

Maybe a party of surveyors or land-locaters was camped nearby. Maybe the Indians had secured the clothing in some house they had pillaged and burned. These were the thoughts which came to

Clay, and fearing that most probably the latter supposition was correct, he circled around the clump of sumac most cautiously.

No one was in sight as the boy reached the opposite side of the thicket, and he went further. Becoming bolder as he looked all about, still seeing no sign of the owner of the garments, he made a short circuit of the valley and climbed the hill in the direction of the house in the tree-top. Still he saw no one.

More frightened than he would have liked to confess, Clay returned to Nell. He found her, a badly scared little girl, crouching among the hickory sprouts.

"Did you hear anybody?" he asked.

"Not the least thing. And I want to go home."

"And do without dinner?"

"I don't think we should have a fire to-day; anyway, not till we find out who is spying around here. I told you I heard footsteps yesterday, Clay."

Nell's suggestion seemed wise, and saying, "Come on, then," Clay led the way back along the stream by the course they had come.

"I tell you, Sis, we must have something to eat,

that's the long and short of it," he protested. "I could shoot a squirrel, or find a turkey, maybe, but it won't do to go firing a rifle and making a noise, and besides, I am saving the powder if we should need to use it on bigger game. So we'll go up past the potato patch and dig up some of those seed potatoes. They will be good as ever when they've been washed; and we can eat them raw, if we want to."

This proposal pleased Nellie, already grown tired of an all meat diet, and as they walked on together they talked in undertones of their discovery and tried in vain to solve the problem, the speedy solution of which seemed so necessary to their safety. If there were friends near, they wished to know it before the strangers were gone; but they were in such fear that Indians, instead, were in the vicinity, that they dared not let themselves be seen.

At the potato patch, however, new light was thrown upon the mystery.

"Why, the rabbits or something have been digging the seed potatoes up!" said Clay, as he knelt beside the row he had planted nearest the woods.

"Look here! More than a dozen hills have been opened!"

"Clay Castle, you look here!"

Nell's voice trembled with awe and excitement, as in a scared whisper she called out, and pointed to the ground at her feet. "Who could have made such tracks as these?"

Plain as could be there were imprinted in the soft earth the footsteps of one who had worn boots, and small boots, too.

Clay looked upon Nell's discovery for a moment in astonishment, then sought to learn whence the tracks had come, and whither they went. The foot-prints were not hard to trace on the ploughed ground. They approached from the woods, and at the end of the row of opened potato hills, returned to the sod and the forest again.

"That's who's been digging up the potatoes, Nell," Clay declared. "Who else is it but the chap whose clothes we saw? And what is the fellow doing here—wearing boots and ruffled shirts? Why, we haven't seen any one having anything but moc-casins on his feet since father threw away the old boots he wore when first we came here!"

"Maybe it is some one who has got lost,—got lost, and hasn't anything to eat," Nell suggested.

"And mebbe again, some sneaking Indian is wearing boots that he stole!" ejaculated Clay, not pleased with Nell's tone of pity.

"We must hurry straight home," Nellie went on.

"And jump in bed and pull the covers up over our heads," said Clay, with sarcasm. "No, I'll tell you, Sis," he continued more gently. "We'll dig out a few potatoes and go to the nest and eat them. Then you must stay there while I see what I can find out."

This proposition did not suit Nell at all, but being an unselfish girl, and knowing how entirely dependent she was upon her brother's protection, she assented and in a short time they had reached the ash. Raw potatoes and salt do not make the very best of dinners, and Clay ate but little.

"We will have some potatoes fried for supper," said Nell, feeling somehow that it was her fault the fare was no better.

"You stay right in the tree all the time, still as a mouse, but watch for anybody passing," Clay ad-

monished, and departed on his spying expedition, his rifle under his arm.

Going first to the clearing to search for indications of any one's having been there, the lad made a discovery which seemed to add to the mystery he wished to fathom. In the ashes where the barn had been, where Mr. Rose's cabin had been and where his father's house had stood, as well, he found footprints exactly like those he had seen at the potato patch. He believed they must have been made the day before, for there had been no wind this day, and yet fine dust had been blown in upon the imprints which had pressed the ashes down. The breeze of the night before had done this, Clay reasoned. By the scattered ashes which had clung to the feet of the person who made the tracks, and by carefully looking for imprints the heel of the boot had made upon the ground, the boy followed the tracks across a corner of the cornfield and into the woods. There he lost the trail. Giving up finding it again, after a painstaking search, he hurried to the natural clearing where the potatoes were planted. Whether the tracks here were fresher than those in the ashes, Clay could not de-

cide, yet he believed they were. He found the footprints in two widely separated places,—where the potato hills had been opened, and at the opposite side of the ploughed ground where the tracks crossed the mellow earth, leading in the direction of the creek.

For some time the youthful detective tried to follow the trail where it led into the woods. He was only partially successful and abandoning the attempt for the time being, made his way watchfully and silently to the creek.

With utmost care Clay approached the sumac bushes where the shirt and stockings had been seen. From behind the young hickories which had sheltered Nell he peeped out. The garments were gone. So unexpected was this discovery that involuntarily the lad dropped to one knee behind the brush, as quickly as if he had seen an Indian. For a minute or two he remained hidden, thinking hard.

"He—or they—are still around here, somewhere, whoever they are," the frightened boy promptly decided, but what his own next move should be was a more difficult conclusion to reach. But courage returned as the effect of the shock of his sudden dis-

covery wore away, and he blamed himself that from the first he had not remained near to watch for the coming of the owner of the clothes. Stealthily he crept around the hickories and searched with keen eyes upon the ground about the sumac bushes. As he expected, he found footprints and they were made, he was sure, by the same boots which had waded in the ashes and crossed the potato patch.

For an hour Clay hunted further about the vicinity, but the ground was high and dry here, and he was unable to find the trail leading away from the spot. He went down the valley to the mouth of the little brook flowing down the ravine past their ash, but seeing no one and finding no further sign of a trail, he turned up the smaller valley and went back to Nell.

"I've made up my mind that it was some party of hunters who turned off the Fort Pitt trail a few miles just to find a safe place to rest and wash some clothes—hunters or land agents," the boy told his sister as they sat in the nest discussing the footprints. "Then, too, it may have been some missionary or some eastern chap who wore the boots, and his guides, or whoever was with him, wore moc-

casins and were more careful not to let their tracks be seen. He is a greenhorn, whoever he is! So I guess we may as well start up the fire, Nell, and have some supper. All the king's men ain't hungrier than I am this minute."

"The beef really isn't fit to eat, Clay," Nell announced as she prepared some steaks for broiling. "Maybe we can make our supper of it, but I'm going to throw the rest away."

"I guess you're not, Sis," the brother spoke up quite sharply.

"I just am, so there! Do you want to make us both sick? And you will have to shoot a deer—or something, for father will surely come by to-morrow and we wouldn't want such meat as this, if he should."

Clay's sharp answer had stirred Nell's temper somewhat, and she spoke with emphasis, but not crossly.

Clay yielded without further words, but the matter ended at last by their smoking the meat and so saving the best parts of it.

When their supper was over the brother and sister set off once more to visit the clearing, planning

to linger in the edge of the woods until sundown or later for they much expected their father would this time be found. They approached the open space cautiously as usual, but quiet as they were, their footsteps or low spoken words were heard; for just as they emerged from the woods, the figure of a human being glided swiftly from the clearing and into the forest two hundred yards from where they stood. They were just in time to see the person vanish among the shadows.

CHAPTER IX.

A GUEST AT THE HOUSE IN THE TREE.

Quicker even than the disappearing figure, Clay's rifle flew to his shoulder and the words, "Stop there!" trembled on his lips. But they were not spoken and he did not shoot, for carefully as he watched and waited, running a little way into the woods, also, in pursuit of the strange visitor, he caught no further sight of him.

"It was a white person, Clay," Nell whispered.

"A white man and he wore boots," the boy responded. "It's blamed mysterious," he reflected aloud. "What did he want here, and why does he run away?"

Nell could not answer the questions Clay asked, more of himself than of her, and did not try. Her

mind busy with her own thoughts, she waited anxiously to see what next her brother would do.

"I guess it's the same chap whose clothes we saw," Clay continued after a minute or two of watching among the trees where the stranger disappeared, "but I want to see his tracks to make sure. Come on, Nell."

The boy led the way and carefully inspected the ground the visitor had passed over. In a slight depression where a puddle of water had lately dried, an imprint of the same kind they had seen before—the track of a well-shaped, high-heeled boot was found.

"He must be some lunatic," Clay observed contemptuously, though greatly worried.

"Or a very wicked person; don't you know the Bible says 'The wicked flee when no man pursueth'?" Nell answered.

"I guess that don't apply to Indian country, Nell. You and I more than half ran away the day we saw those duds on the bushes and found the tracks at the potato patch."

"Clay Castle, we did not," the girl asserted bravely, "and the Bible is the same the whole

world over; and if it wasn't for the psalm that says, 'Yea though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death,' I would never dare stay in the nest alone, at all. You mustn't say such things."

The boy and girl had now seated themselves on the roots of a giant oak and were watching the clearing as they had come to do, hoping to see their father. So hasty had been the flight of the mysterious stranger that the thought that he might return did not so much as occur to them; and though Clay was vigilant, as he knew he always must be, he failed to hear the sound of approaching footsteps, slow and stealthy.

"Say! Who are you?"

Quicker than a jack-in-the-box, Clay leaped up, and turning saw an arm and face reaching out from behind a beech less than twenty yards away. In the hand of that arm was a pistol pointed squarely toward him.

Nell made the same discovery as she also sprang to her feet and in less than a second put the big oak between herself and the threatening weapon.

Clay was quick to realize that the question was directed to him alone and that it was at his own per-

son that the pistol was pointed. Seeing that Nell was for the moment safe, he faltered but an instant before replying in rather unsteady tones:

"I guess you can see for yourself, can't ye?"

"You look like an Indian," the person behind the beech made answer. "Who's the girl?"

"She's my sister—and who—" Clay would have said, "and who are you?" the good English and boyish tones of the visitor having restored his courage to a marked degree, but the other interrupted him:

"Put down your gun, will you, and I'll come out and take a look at you."

Quite reassured, though he did not like the stranger's dictatorial manner, Clay stood his rifle against the oak, still holding the pistol, though he allowed the hand which bore it to drop to his side, the mysterious individual walked forward.

By the fading light Clay discovered the stranger to be a youth of probably sixteen years, quite tall, but slender, and having the unmistakable marks of a man from the city about him. There were ruffles at his cuffs and collar and though his clothing was torn, it was plain from the top of his cocked

hat to the tips of his high boots that he was used to wearing such garments. There was at first a desperate air about him which now seemed to be disappearing, and making the discovery that the stranger was as much affrighted as he himself was, Clay boldly asked:

"Who are you, since you ask me the same question?"

"I ain't a savage, anyway," the young fellow answered rather defiantly. "Do you live near here? Do you know what money is?"

The latter question made Clay smile. He knew now that here was a young man from the far east who probably had never been in the wilderness before, and had no notion that any one living in the backwoods could be quite civilized. But he replied:

"We lived just here till the Indians burned our buildings, and as for money, you won't find much use for it in these woods."

Nell had come out from behind the oak and stood looking at the stranger much as she might have looked at some rare animal. It had been a long time since she had seen any one dressed in any but

the clothing of the frontier. The youth noticed her curious gaze, also that she had an intelligent, pretty face, fine large eyes and a lot of wavy dark hair. Her look of wonderment caused him to smile in a feeble way, and, touching his hand to his hat, he bowed slightly and said:

"Good even', Mistress Curiosity."

"Good evening, sir," she answered very soberly, and made a pretty curtsey her mother had taught her.

This show of partial civility from the stranger somehow made Clay feel more kindly toward him, and he asked in pleasanter tones than he had yet used:

"You aren't alone in the woods, are you? We saw your tracks and I tried to find you—couldn't make out who might have made them."

"Look here, my boy," said the stranger patronizingly, "you probably thought it was strange the way I ran when you came up a little while ago; but your rigging and your long hair and your face so scratched—i' faith, you do look like an Indian! And yes, I'm alone in these vile woods—half starved and almost sick. Now, I'll be fair with you and

if you show me something to eat and a fit place to sleep to-night, and to-morrow help me out of this hole, I'll pay you well. You can buy a fine lot of things with the money if you ever get to a town."

Something in the stranger's manner made Clay cross. The very thought of the newcomer saying "my boy," and he only a boy himself, kindled his wrath. But he bridled his temper and said:

"You'll be welcome to the best we've got, stranger. It's mighty little, and you probably think it's mighty poor, after what you've likely been used to, but as to showing you the way out of the woods, I can't do that till my father comes back. We expect him to-night or to-morrow. He probably won't come to-night now, though, it's getting so late. To answer your other question, I didn't know whether you were scared or what the matter was when you dodged out of the clearing the way you did. But I was a little scared myself and I guess anybody would be after the Indians had burned his house and carried off his mother, or maybe killed her. And last of all, I don't care if I do look like an Indian, and what's more I don't care whether you like it or not."

The mention of his great loss was no doubt largely responsible for the temper Clay exhibited in finishing his statement, and, in a very uncertain way, for he was but a boy himself, the stranger knew that this was true. For an instant his heart was touched with pity, but the next moment he remembered only his own suffering and thought only of himself again.

"Well, you can get me something to eat; and a place to sleep, can't you? You don't sleep on the ground or roost in trees, as I've been doing?"

"Did you get lost? Are you lost now?" Nell asked quite tenderly; for she saw that the young man was in real distress.

The shadow of a smile came over the stranger's face again. Nell's pleasant voice and sympathetic manner interested him.

"I've been lost for two days—i' faith, there's no doubt of that!" he answered. "And nothing to eat but the trash I could find in the woods and the raw potatoes I dug out of—it was your daddy's potato patch, I suspect. But it's getting pretty dark," he added, turning to Clay, inquiringly.

"You may come with us; we have the nicest lit-

tle house in a tree! And you and my brother can sleep in the parlor and I'll sleep in the kitchen," put in Nell, smiling as she thought what a queer parlor the young man would find it to be.

"Yes, you come along with us," Clay joined in, somewhat less cordially. "But we have only a nest in the top of an ash that hangs over the ravine, and we can't give you much to eat. We'd do better for you if we could."

"I'll take care that you don't lose anything by what you do for me," the stranger answered rather stiffly. "My father is rich and I can afford to pay you well for all your trouble," he went on, as with one parting glance about the clearing Clay led the way into the deep twilight of the woods. "I'm mighty glad you can speak English. I had no idea what sort of language they had in this howling backwoods. What's your name?"

"Clay—Clay Castle," came the answer, none too pleasantly; for Clay could not try to be agreeable as long as the stranger seemed to put himself so far above him.

"And mine is Nellie," said the little girl shyly. "What is your name?"

"Frederick Fravel. My father's name is William Fravel—if he isn't dead." The stranger added the latter words with a sigh.

"I'll bet you were in a fight with the Indians," Clay exclaimed. "I don't know just what makes me think so, but I do."

"It's a good guess, anyhow," the new boy answered. "I'll tell you about it when I get something inside of me. Empty only half tells the way I feel now. I'd have starved only for some turkey eggs and those potatoes I found; and raw eggs and raw potatoes ain't exactly what I've been used to. I suppose my father spends as much just for the table as any man in Philadelphia—ever hear of Philadelphia?—but he can afford it well enough."

"Our mother lived in Philadelphia when she was a girl," said Nell; but the mention of the turkey eggs had given Clay an idea and he broke in with:

"Nell, there's a turkey's nest in a brush-heap t'other side of the creek. I found it about a week ago but let it be because there were only three eggs in it. There's likely a dozen by this time. The hen must have been pretty late finding a nesting place,

because I've seen little turkeys out already this year."

"I do wish we had the eggs to-night," said the girl, thinking that the poor fare they would be able to set before their guest must be a reflection upon her ability as a housekeeper, and planning how she would prepare the eggs if they were at hand.

"Queer sort of a shack you've built," was the comment of Frederick Fravel when Clay had guided him along the trunk of the ash into the nest at the top. "How long have you been roosting here?"

"It's a pretty comfortable place and a safe one," Clay answered a little resentfully. "Besides it wasn't built to hold three."

"Conscience! how touchy you are!" ejaculated the stranger. "I didn't—"

"Oh, it's ever so much better than being on the ground, and the wolves would surely have got us if we hadn't been up out of reach, night before last," Nell interrupted, "and I think you'll find your bed more comfortable than lying on the ground, as you said you did."

"Don't you forget to stand up for brother, little Wild Flower," Frederick Fravel answered, good

humoredly, for as it had done before, Nell's voice unmistakably pleased him.

The kindly tone the newcomer used whenever he spoke to Nellie smoothed Clay's ruffled feelings again, somewhat, and without saying more he blew the smoldering coals of their little fire till a blaze crept up among the bits of wood he piled on, and feeling her way in the dark, Nell already had some of the partially smoked meat ready for broiling.

"I guess I'll have some more supper too, and keep you company," said Clay, as the visitor prepared to eat. "I'm 'way short of ammunition and haven't had a chance to get any good game. Maybe I can get a crack at a deer or something, tomorrow."

"You were going to tell about being in a fight with Indians," Nell reminded their guest a few minutes later.

"I—I just can't eat this meat, that's all there is about it! I'm sick. I thought I was hungry till a minute ago," grumbled Master Fravel, paying no attention to Nell. "It's tough as a cow hide, anyway!"

Clay would have made an inhospitable reply, but his sister spoke first, saying:

"It isn't very good, we know; but it must be that you are sick, too, or most anything would taste good after such a starving as you have had. And you aren't used to being away from home."

"There, that was hardly a fair shot," said the stranger in a milder voice. "I've been away from home—well, some! To England and back, at least," he added boastfully.

"No, I didn't mean that, really, sir," Nell returned. "I meant to say that you are not used to the hard life in the woods. Your clothes tell that, if nothing else. Wouldn't something warm to drink be good for you? Clay, can't we make some sassafras tea?"

If Frederick Fravel himself had made the request, Clay would hardly have undertaken to find sassafras roots in the dark, for he felt none too kindly toward the fellow; but for Nell, and to help her do the honors of the house as he knew she was trying to do, he said:

"Yes, there's a tree not far from here. Wait about two jiffies."

Taking the ax, he climbed out on the trunk and to the ground. On the hillside nearby he located

the tree he sought by feeling the rough bark, and digging down knew the sassafras roots when he came to them by their fragrance. He broke in short lengths a good sized root he pulled up, washed the pieces at the brook and returned to the nest.

The water was already hot and the sassafras was soon steeping.

"You'll have to drink out of this bullet ladle; it's what we've been using, and it has been washed clean," Nell told the stranger; and without comment except to say, "Much obliged, little Wild Flower," Master Fravel swallowed a pint or more of the sweet-smelling tea.

"It would be better if it were earlier in the spring; pretty late to make good sassafras tea—the sap has gone from the roots up into the trees," Clay remarked.

"'Pon my honor, I am sick, and that's what's the matter! Am I to sleep in this dog kennel here? Because I think I'll crawl in. What the deuce! Is this old carpet all the bed clothes you have?"

Even Nell could not make a pleasant answer to this ungrateful outburst, and Clay held his tongue

only because he felt that to say what he thought might start a fight; beside, the stranger was sick. There could be no doubt about that.

CHAPTER X.

THE STRANGER'S STORY.

Where the brother and sister were to sleep since he was appropriating their bed entirely to himself, seemed to trouble Frederick Fravel not at all. Perhaps he did not think of them, or if he did, what were they or their comfort to him? The children of a backwoodsman, a "squatter," whose house had been burned, whom he would pay in money for whatever trouble they were put to on his account.

Where they were to sleep was a more interesting question to Clay and Nell, however, and all they could do was lie down in the open part of the nest—Nell upon the floor of rough poles, and Clay upon the seat which ran the length of this portion of their house. Both were awake a large part of the

night and heard their guest tossing restlessly upon his more comfortable bed and often muttering unintelligibly.

Greatly they longed for the morning's coming. Surely their father would return by another day. Much they speculated in their own minds, also, upon the adventures which had brought this city boy so far into the woods and cast him off by himself with no clothing save that he wore, with no food or means to obtain any except two pistols and a knife which he carried like a sword at his belt.

With the coming of daylight at last, Nell busied herself with the fire while Clay set off at a rapid pace to get the wild turkey eggs of which he had spoken. Also did Nellie take more pains than usual in washing her face and hands and braiding her hair this morning. The womanly pride in her heart made her wish to make a proper appearance, in the presence of visitors especially, and the result was that her bright eyes and pink cheeks were very pleasant indeed, to see, when Master Fravel put his head out of the covered nest and gazed about him.

"Wolves howled all night, as usual," he remarked after answering Nell's "good morning."

"But they weren't anywhere near. One night they were right under the tree, clear till morning."

"Must have been pleasant," the boy responded with cold sarcasm.

Further Master Fravel said in reply to Nell's inquiry that he still felt sick—ague or malaria, something—he said, had attacked him, and he did not feel able to stir.

Clay soon came with the eggs and as they were nice and fresh they made very good eating when hard boiled. Indeed, this was the nicest breakfast the brother and sister had yet had in their tree house. The stranger ate all of one egg but a part of the second he threw away. Such conduct was very wasteful, Nell thought, but she said nothing and presently of his own accord the strange youth began telling how he happened to be in the woods.

"Why, you see," he suddenly said, "my father was coming west to look at some land or something in this backwoods country and got two fellows to come along with him. These chaps had bought land of the Indians and were going to buy it again

from the Virginia government or have His Majesty, King George, or somebody, I don't know who, sort of confirm their title to it, then sell off large tracts to settlers. I heard them and my dad talking about it as we came along.

"We got to Fort Pitt all right and stayed there two days, then started on along a thing they called a road—nothing but a vile Indian trail—and so come on into this black wilderness. They said at Fort Pitt that we'd better look out for redskins, but the land agents or guides told us there was no danger and father and I came along with them, my daddy being very anxious to reach a certain settlement that he had been inquiring about. We had got pretty near to a river,—a place they call the Great Crossing Place of the Muskingum—where we were to get canoes or build some to travel down stream, when, just at evening, as we had gone into camp, Ed, one of the land sharks, came rushing up from the valley where he had gone for water, yelling, 'We're surrounded by Indians! Cut out, every man for himself! It's the only chance!'

"Almost the same second there came a horrible yelling, the shooting began, and it being pretty

dark I couldn't see where the others had gone, so I made a dive for the woods. The shooting was all over in a little while, but I heard the bloody war-whoops as long as I could hear anything. So I kept moving right along most all night through brush and timber and bogs and briers. I could have shot a couple of the red rascals, but the guides had taken to their heels and I couldn't stay around there killing Indians and getting killed while I looked after my father; so here I am. I must have passed pretty close to this tree the very day after the fight. I—"

"You did. I heard you," Nell put in interestedly, "and was so scared!"

"Well, I suspect that I'd have been scared more if I had caught sight of you perching up here," answered the boy, with a grim little smile.

"But why didn't you keep a-going?" asked Clay. "You've been around here then, since yesterday."

"And you think it time I was moving along! Come, be honest now?" Fravel asked, haughtily.

"Look a here, my fine buck," cried Clay, his temper fired, "I don't intend to insult you and I don't intend to be insulted. You needn't be so stuck up because you are from Philadelphia! There's just

as good people west of the Allegheny mountains as there are east of 'em! You're hardly any, if any, older than I am, and I don't want you to call me 'my boy,' like you did once before. If you—"

"Hush! Clay Castle, what are you saying?" Nell interrupted in shocked, embarrassed tones.

"I was just a-going to say," Clay went on, but more mildly, "that I want you to stay here till you get in shape to go to the settlements or to hunt for your father, wherever he may be. Goodness knows I'm not the one to give you a cold shoulder and my own mother carried off by the Mingoes, or—or killed! But I want you to know that we are not doing anything for you expecting to be paid for it, but because—"

"Let me tell you," the stranger broke in in low, even tones—"Let me tell you, young Spitfire,—you don't care if I call you spitfire, do you? I—"

"I care, if he doesn't!" cried Nell, her eyes flashing. "His name is Clay Castle, and you can call him by his Christian name as easily as you can use the horrid word you did."

"O, ho, Mistress Nell! But very well, and you must call me Fred, then, now mind," the lad an-

swered quite good humoredly—"and very well, Clay, I was only going to say that we do things in a different way in Philadelphia. We pay for what we get and expect to get all we pay for. Why, I wouldn't have crawled into your bed the way I did, but I expected to pay for it; there's nothing mean about me."

"You didn't say how you happened to stay about here after all—Fred," suggested Nell, shyly using the stranger's name, as he paused.

"No, I didn't, but I will now. You'd better believe that I was a sight to look upon after falling into bushes and bogs for half a night, then staying in a slimy tree till morning. So when I came to a creek of clear water, I thought I'd play washerwoman; but I saw an opening off among the trees and went up to it. It pretty near took the wind out of my canvas, I tell you, to find a ploughed field right there in the jungle, but I 'wasn't long finding out what was planted there and filling my pockets with potatoes; and then I began gaping 'round to see whose field it might be. After a while I found out where the clearing had been made and pretty near keeled over again when I saw just the

smoking logs of the shanties. I looked all about the place and, judging by broken dishes, a half burned squirrel cage and one thing and another, I knew that white folks had lived there. What had become of them, whether they was all killed—"

"Were all killed," Nell unconsciously murmured, but Master Fravel did not hear. She was heartily glad he did not, and that without pausing he continued.

"Or not, and whether there might be a fort handy, I wanted to find out. It was getting late, though, and I made up my mind to skirmish around and see what else I could find to eat. Of course, I knew it must have been Indians that had burned the buildings, and having nothing but my two pistols—I lost my rifle when our party was pitched onto—I didn't care to meet any big band of 'em. On that account I dodged around shy as a chipmunk. Over across the creek I lighted onto a high, dry knoll covered with bushes and crawled in there and went to sleep. It was dead dark when I woke up, pretty near froze, and all I could do was shiver till morning. After I had walked around awhile and got my blood in circulation, and the sun came out decently warm, I

went down to the creek, washed the dirtiest of my clothes, hung 'em up and went back to the bushes on the knoll again till they dried. The morning before, up the valley above here, I had blundered onto a turkey's nest and got three eggs out of it. These and some leaves I chewed and the raw potatoes, was every blessed thing I had to eat and you better lay to it I was pretty near dead of hunger. After a while I concluded to go up to the burned shanties again and poke around; maybe I could find some bread, or I didn't know what, lying around. I was digging in the ashes up there when I heard you two coming—only, of course, I didn't know who it was till afterward—and broke into the woods. I wasn't fooling either, young friend,—Clay, I should say"—this with a polite bow to Nell—"when I said you looked like an Indian. I never saw anyone rigged in buckskin before except Indians and some chaps around Fort Pitt.

"So now you know the whole story, and what I want to know is, just how soon you expect your dad to get back, and just how soon I can be getting to a regular dinner table and a bed and other convenient things of that sort."

"We don't say 'dad,'" mildly protested Nell.

"Of course not; I should have known better than that. How soon do you expect your right honorable governor then? I'll be thinking that I have come into the backwoods to learn to speak the King's English."

This speech did not please Nellie, but she said no more, Clay speaking for her, good naturedly:

"Nell wants everybody to talk just as nice as she does. Our mother has drilled her to use good grammar, because she will be going east to school some time and won't want to talk so different from other people. And as to father's coming, I thought you knew we were expecting him today. And I must trace along up to the clearing, right away, to look for him."

"I'll go too. I ain't hardly able to crawl, though," said Fred.

"I'll stay and do up my housework," Nell smiled, and cautioning her to make no noise, Clay trotted down the trunk of the ash, their visitor following more slowly, for he was still not quite well, and his muscles and joints were sore and stiff. Exposure

and hardships were things he had never known before.

As the two boys walked along, Clay tried for the hundredth time to reason out just how far his father had traveled each day, what news he had probably heard, and just when he might be expected to return. If he did not come this day, the lad concluded, there was no knowing when he would come.

Fred's thoughts were of other things and he grumbled not a little that there was no certain way in which he could leave the woods or get in communication with his own father.

"You seem to be so sure that he got away from the Indians. Not that I think he didn't, but—" Clay paused.

"I suppose he could get away if I did, couldn't he?" Fred responded.

"He ought to at any rate. He's a dead shot and I guess he could take care of himself if I took care of myself! No Indian would get in front of his gun more than once—if he knew what was good for him!"

In further conversation, Fred told with much egotism of the splendors of life in Philadelphia, of

parties he had attended, and fine clothes he had at home—much to Clay's disgust, though he thought he was filling the young pioneer's mind with envy.

The same dreadful silence and forsaken air which Clay had felt upon coming to the clearing each day since the burning of the cabins, he noticed again, as he and Fred passed out of the woods. He was sure his father had not been there, but made search for footprints or other indications of his having visited the spot, hoping to find himself mistaken. All his looking was in vain.

"You didn't tell me anything about how you and your sister got away from the Reds that burned you out," suggested Fred, as the two stood beside the ashes of the Castle cabin.

"You didn't ask me—didn't seem to care much about it," Clay answered coolly. He had all along felt resentful that the young stranger had shown so little interest in anything but his own affairs.

"I'm asking you now, ain't I?"

And then Clay told what he knew of the attack on the cabin and what followed, purposely belittling his own adventures and bravery, as Fred had exaggerated his, in a spirit very like spite.

"And so we've got to painfully linger here, no one knows how long," was the visitor's comment. "But say, 'twouldn't be half bad," he went on, quite jovially, "if we had a snug cabin, a jolly good supply of things to eat, plenty of ammunition, and all that!"

"And if you knew that your father was safe and Nell and I knew that mother was safe, and that it was only a matter of days till father would be coming," Clay added, just a bit despondently. "But we've got to make the best of it, and to get enough to eat once, I'm going to try for a deer."

"That's good, and I'll go with you. I couldn't do much with pistols though, and you can take both of mine, if you'll let me have your rifle."

"You have no notion how saving we'll have to be with the powder," Clay answered, ignoring Fred's proposal. "I've got lead and a mold to make bullets, but all the powder there is, is in my horn, except what you have."

Presently the boys returned to the nest in the ash. Nell's disappointment, when she learned that her father had not come, was great, but she tried, on account of the stranger's presence, to hold back

her tears, and in a few minutes suggested that, as they would probably have to spend another night in the tree, room for another bed of twigs and leaves should be provided.

"Right you are, Nell, and we may as well get at it," Clay promptly answered.

"Oh, what's the use?" grumbled Frederick Fravel. "I want to go hunting."

CHAPTER XI.

NEW CAUSE FOR ALARM.

Clay got the ax from its hiding place in a hollow stump, and went to work, Nell helping him, while Fred sat by, looking on. As he struggled with poles and tangled grape-vines, Clay's suppressed wrath increased at each fresh suggestion and word of advice from the lad, who remained in idleness.

But he controlled his temper admirably until at last, as he needed some one to hold a pole in place while he bound it with the tough, pliable vines, and Nell was picking twigs some distance away, he called quite sharply:

"Here, Fred, come up and help! This house is as much for you as anybody!"

The Philadelphia boy's face grew red, but there

was nothing for it but to obey, and he did. And so patiently did he do the work asked of him, that Clay, rather ashamed of having spoken as he did, made a special effort to be friendly.

"We'll hustle up and get this thing finished and then go to the creek and get some fish for dinner," he proposed. "Do you like fish?"

"I' faith, I believe I could eat scales and all," was the answer.

When the pole was in place, Clay found something else for Fred to do, and so kept him busy until the addition to the tree-top house, merely an extension and roof over a part of that heretofore left open, was completed.

Nell joined the boys in their fishing expedition, and Fred's illness having quite disappeared, they made a merry party. Clay gave the pole and line to Fred an equal share of the time, and, although the latter seemed not overly appreciative of this generosity, and could not refrain from telling of the fine assortment of fishing tackle he had at home, the kindly act set him thinking.

Nicely fried, the fish made an appetizing meal. Fred's comment that he was not used to eating

with his fingers, and Nell's quick rejoinder, "Neither are we," was the only unpleasant incident of the dinner.

It was with some twinges of conscience that Clay left Nell alone in the afternoon, while he and Fred went to the clearing once more, and thence toward the river bottoms to hunt. She had said she would not be afraid, but still it was not pleasant to think of her remaining hidden while he was having a good time, for there were few things he liked better than hunting. He had not felt uncomfortable over it when he had left her alone of necessity.

Fred's suggestion of the morning that he would exchange his pistols for the rifle was not referred to again, as the two lads tramped along, but Clay had his own plans, and when they had reached the hunting grounds, near where the creek flowed into the river,—far enough from the tree-top house that the discharge of a gun would attract no one to that vicinity—he said:

"You take the rifle, Fred, and the first shot we get will be yours, then I'll have my turn."

"Why, bless me, coz, I will say that you're a fair chap!" Fred exclaimed, in a burst of appreciation.

"I'm a game shot with my own gun. I don't know what I'll do with yours. It's heavy enough!"

The fact was that Fred had boasted so much of his marksmanship that, now he found himself about to be put to the test, he inwardly trembled for the result. He kept his spirits up, however, by hoping that fortune would favor him, and some time later was thinking what excuse he might make if he should miss, when Clay quietly laid one hand upon his arm, and with the other, pointed through the bushes and low branches of the trees. There, not more than sixty yards away, just visible through the leaves, was the shoulder of a deer.

"Can't we get a little nearer?" Fred excitedly whispered. "Where's something to rest this blessed heavy rifle on?"

Clay shut his lips tight, and shook his head as a sign for absolute quiet, then nodded vigorously to indicate that no time must be lost.

Fred's glance fell upon the low limb of a water beech just before him at the same second, and resting the barrel of the rifle upon it, he took steady aim. The deer was feeding with its head down. As Fred aimed, the creature lifted its nose and for a

second sniffed the air. No better shot could have been wished for. In a fever of excitement, lest Fred pause too long, Clay waited. In another instant the rifle cracked. Making a great leap forward, the deer went to the ground, and was dying when the boys reached its side.

"I' faith, that's what I'd call a good shot!" Fred exclaimed, as they ran up.

Down deep in his heart, Clay had believed, even hoped, that Fred would miss; but he did not allow his new friend to see this.

"It did all that any shot could have done, though I guess it just touched the heart instead of going through it," he answered. "And it's as nice a two-year-old buck as I ever saw killed—sleek as silk!" he went on, cutting a slit in the animal's throat, that it might bleed. "Now one of us must get away a little piece and keep his peepers open while the other skins the deer."

"What for?" Fred asked, quite astonished.

"To save our scalps, that's what for!"

"I never skinned a deer in my life; but I can do most anything; show me where to begin."

Taking this as a very substantial hint that Fred

did not care to do guard duty and watch for any Indians that might have been attracted by the rifle's discharge, Clay quickly showed him how to cut beneath the tendons of the deer's hind legs, hang the body on a low limb of a tree and make a long incision from the throat of the buck along its under side to the hind quarters, then remove the skin, working from the uppermost parts down. Further cautioning Fred against cutting through the skin as he worked, Clay retired to a knoll a few hundred feet away, from which he could get a view in all directions.

Three times before his task was completed, the city youth had to call the young woodsman to give him assistance, but the work was done at last. No Indian had put in an appearance, and, one much elated, the other less gleeful in his words and actions, the boys started homeward, taking turn about at carrying the venison they had secured. For there was no need of killing more game than they could use, Clay said, and yet he did hope for an opportunity of showing Fred what he could do with a rifle.

Clay found the chance to give the exhibition he

had in mind, a little later. High up in an oak in an open part of the woods, he noticed a squirrel.

"Hold on a jiffy," he said. "Squirrels are mighty fine eating after a chap's been sick, as you've been, and I want to waste a shot on that fellow."

As the squirrel was pointed out to him on a forked limb, sixty feet from the ground, Fred looked with much interest to see the result of the shot.

With scarcely a pause, Clay brought the heavy rifle to his shoulder and let drive, seeming to take no aim whatever. To his great surprise, he failed. The squirrel vanished among some denser foliage. A white groove in the limb not an inch below where its head had been, however, showed that the shot was not so very bad, notwithstanding. Still Clay thought that he never had felt quite so chagrined and sheepish, and as he caught Fred's inquiring eye, he said, candidly:

"That's what I get for trying to show off. I'm going to be honest and own up that that's the reason I wanted to shoot."

"Coz, you're a brick, I declare!" Fred exclaimed, cordially, and slapped Clay's back heartily. "Bless me, if ever I came upon a straighter fellow! But

you don't need worry for fear I'll think you can't shoot."

Clay's straightforward confession had done more to win Fred's admiration than a perfect shot could have done. The fairness and honesty of the pioneer boy made the lad from the east think better and better of him, whereas at first he had considered the young man in buckskin as far beneath him in every way. Moreover, he began to be a trifle ashamed that he himself had boasted so much. In his heart he knew that Clay was the better shot. The off-hand way in which the latter had fired, missing by less than an inch, conclusively proved this.

The boys went directly to the house in the ash, planning to go to the clearing again, later. Clay's whistle brought a trembling response from Nell, and as she came out to meet the lads, it was plain to be seen that she had been frightened.

"Goodness, Nell, did you see a ghost?" her brother asked.

"Clay, I saw four Indians all in war paint,—four of them, and there was a man with them—a white man, his hands tied, and a rope around his neck!"

From between Clay's teeth came a low whistle

of surprise, while Fred glanced over one shoulder, then the other, in a way which showed his alarm.

"How long ago, Nell? Which way did they go?" her brother inquired.

"Most an hour, I think, and they went toward the clearing. You can see their trail over by that big sugar tree, if you look for it," and she pointed to a maple not many rods distant. "I heard them coming, and peeked out, and oh dear, the white man—the prisoner—his face was cut and the blood dried on it, and he walked so lame! I'm sure he had been shot. And he looked so miserable and everything!"

"What kind of clothes did he have on?" asked Fred. thinking of his father.

"All buckskin. It wasn't your father, Fred,—and no hat at all. He wasn't an old man, either. I think it was Panther Dilly, Clay, but I cannot be sure."

"I'll bet that's who it was; but it's mighty strange, too, if the Indians caught him! And it's stranger still that a war party should be going along here with a prisoner, so far from the trail."

"Can't we cut? I'm getting anxious about my father, too," said Fred in a low voice. "If your own

father don't come by sundown, can't we cut sticks for the settlements?"

"You and Nell stay in the tree, and I'll scout out to the clearing right now," Clay suggested, and set off at once.

The Indians had been at no pains to hide their trail, and Clay was soon following it. He reached the clearing and found where the tracks skirted the edge of the woods and then turned toward the south again. He followed them as far as the creek, then returned to the clearing.

"Some roving war party that has captured a trader or maybe a spy from Fort Pitt," was Clay's conclusion. "It isn't likely the man was Panther Dilly, because he wouldn't have been near here; but if it was, things are mighty bad when they can make him a prisoner."

Until sundown, the lad watched about the clearing hoping to see his father, then returned to Nell and Fred, thinking of the latter's wish to "cut sticks" for the settlements. This they must not do, he decided. Their duty he considered to be to wait and watch for Mr. Castle's coming that without delay they might give him the best information pos-

sible concerning their mother. And he and his sister and Fred, also, were as safe hiding in the woods as they would be in trying to reach the border more than fifty miles away, he believed.

The necessity of being even more quiet and cautious than they had been heretofore, impressed itself upon Clay's mind however, and he told his companions of this when he reached them. Very guardedly, therefore, was a tiny fire kindled for the preparation of venison for supper, and the light was so hedged in with green boughs, that, going a short distance away, Clay found he could scarcely detect the rays from the flames, though he looked closely.

With a bed of leaves for each, and a bit of rag carpet in addition for Nell, for Fred was much more agreeable than he had been the night before, now that he had found that this boy and girl of the backwoods were not barbarians, exactly—the night was passed in comparative comfort. Nell bore her grief over the continued absence of her father without complaining and Clay kept to himself the troubled fears which came to him that it might be that Mr. Castle, like the unfortunate fellow Nell had seen, was a prisoner.

Fred had expressed during the evening far more concern for the safety of his own father than he had done before. He seemed only to begin to understand what pioneer life meant, and that an Indian uprising was a serious matter. In the east he had so often seen soldiers and continental militiamen that the thought that any great danger could threaten from the savages of the forest had never occurred to him.

When he started west with his father, his notion was, that with his rifle and two pistols, he could hold at bay a half dozen Indians. That the redmen were well armed and, except in remote regions, no longer fought with bows and arrows, had not been within his knowledge; or if so, he had not thought of it, but always pictured the savages as nearly naked creatures who would flee at the sound of a gun. His knowledge of England was much better than his knowledge of his own country, except that portion along the sea-board, and his conviction that the colonies constituted all of America which was worth while, was the result.

Afar off, the wolves were howling and in the trees a soft breeze whispered; and to this lullaby

the three occupants of the house in the ash fell asleep at last. The late moon rose over the miles and miles of unbroken forest, tranquilly and beautifully as when, in these latter days, it shines down upon cities and villages and long stretches of farm-bordered roads. But to those who slept, there came no dreams of the long weeks of privation, danger, and suffering which were in store for them.

CHAPTER XII.

THE QUARREL.

"I wouldn't mind a little greater variety of provender," growled Fred over the breakfast of venison, a few days later. "By George, I ain't used to such fodder! At home we always have whatever we want, almost, except tea. Father hasn't let that come into the house since the tax was put upon it; not but what we can afford it, but he said it wasn't fair to the colonies to pay the tax or to drink the tea; so we have none of it. Father says his Majesty and the colonies will have to fight it out with powder one o' these days. I'd be on the side of the colonies, wouldn't you, or didn't you ever hear of these things?"

"Why, yes, we did; don't you remember, Clay,

the missionary who stayed all night at our house? He told about the men throwing the tea into the water at Boston Harbor last winter and he and father talked nearly all night about such things."

"But you don't belong to any of the colonies, so you wouldn't fight if there should be a war," Fred went on in a superior tone. "Or, maybe you would be on the side of the crown."

"And maybe we wouldn't!" Clay answered, hotly. "Panther Dilly was in Philadelphia as long ago as when the first frosts came last year, and he told us about the trouble that's brewing, and besides, we knew all about the talk that's going on before we left Pennsylvania. Father said only this spring at corn-ploughing time, that we were for America and ready to fight if it comes to that; and I say the same now. It's such men as your father, Fred Fravel, who have had favors from the King's toadies, that will be found on his side. You think that fine clothes and that sort of thing are all that's worth having, and that the plain people and what they think don't count."

Fred flared up like a torch of pine and pitch.

"You backwoods yokel!" he exclaimed, "you don't

know what you're talking about. My father having favors from the King! And being on his side! I'd fight you for a good bit less than a sixpence!"

"You boys ought to be ashamed—ever so ashamed, of yourselves," cried Nell, in injured tones, just in time to avert a clash between the two, for Fred was already pulling off his coat. "And Clay, I don't think it was fair for you to say what you did about Fred's father, for how can you know anything about it? And, Master Fravel, we may live in the backwoods, but we are not ignorant savages! If we had better 'fodder' as you call it,—and I don't think such language very pretty—you should have it. Is it fair for you to complain, then?"

Both boys started to talk at once, and Clay managed to say:

"Fred knows very well that the land his father was going to look at was to be ceded to him or some one, by the toadies connected with the King's government, and all they wanted was to have the Indians give up their claims. Every spring and every fall, there are men coming here and to other parts of the west with such schemes."

"'Tain't so," Fred answered, angrily. "If anyone

was going to get any land from the crown, it was the jobbers my father talked of buying from. And what's the odds how they get the land if they have the right to sell it? And for the matter of that, anyhow, my father was not looking for land, though he made believe he was. If you're spoiling for a fight, just say so—just say so, I say! I——"

"No, I ain't spoiling for a fight as much as you are; but I'm not afraid of you nor two more just like you! What I don't like, is your coming along here the way you did, then forever grumbling because things don't suit you and telling how much better you've been used to. What do I care what you—Maybe you think this is a free tavern?"

"The Fravels never begged yet, and here's one that don't beg now," cried Fred, harshly, trembling with anger. "I'll see that you are paid for what I've had from you, and you don't need worry on that score," and he strode down the trunk of the ash haughtily. "I do want to say goodbye to you, though, Miss Nellie—goodbye," he turned and said very quickly at the foot of the tree, then fast as he could walk, hurried away in the direction of the

great trail and Crossing Place of the Muskingum far to the north.

Nell could not and would not accept or answer such a farewell. She could not think of allowing Fred to go away in this manner, to risk his life alone in a wild country of which he knew nothing. Soon she was running after him and calling his name, but he did not turn back or give her the slightest heed.

Sullen and sulky, Clay sat in the nest when Nell reluctantly returned a few minutes later, having succeeded only in making Fred hurry on the faster.

"You wicked boy!" the girl exclaimed and burst into tears. "And there he goes straight toward the worst Indian trail there is, running right into their arms! And what does he know about the woods—a boy who has always lived in the towns? Aren't you ashamed?"

Clay did not need to be told that he had not done right; his own conscience assured him of that; but he was angry and Nell's words had no noticeable effect upon him. It was her tears and smothered sobs as she hid her face in her arms that made him relent somewhat at last.

"Goodness, Sis, I can't go chasing after that fellow, can I?" he demanded, in a moody voice, lifting up Nell's bowed head as she sat near him. "He went off of his own free will, and you can't blame me, can you? Wasn't he always sniffing and turning up his nose at us?"

"Clay, did you never hear mother say that a soft answer turneth away wrath, but grievous words stir up anger? Instead of that, you growled at Fred as much as he did at you. And this is our home—all the home we've got! And here in our own house you quarreled with a stranger, who was our company."

Clay made no answer. He knew well enough what he ought to do, and that that was what, at heart, he wanted to do; but vanity stood in the way. No matter if Fred had provoked him, he had spoken most offensively himself; he was obliged to admit this. But could he humble himself before the city boy after what had taken place, even for that boy's own good? To save his life, perhaps? And would he? Would Fred himself do as much in his place? "Not by a jugful!" was the mental ejaculation in answer.

Maybe in her quick, bright way Nell guessed something of what was passing in Clay's mind; maybe she only chanced to say the right thing at the right time—it is a way some people have, which this child of the forests possessed.

"It isn't the same as if Fred lived just a few miles away and was only going home where we could see him again," said the girl, tears in her eyes. "He's a headstrong, foolish boy, and I know that he has said some things which hurt worse than a whipping, but he has no notion of the danger he is running straight into, and we have. He isn't used to the woods, and we are. And not a bite to eat, and only his pistols! And more than all the rest, he doesn't know the way to—to any place. Clay Castle," and this very gently and soberly—"if Fred Fravel is killed or is lost and dies in the woods, you and I will be to blame."

Slowly Clay's anger subsided, and as before, he had acknowledged to himself that Nell was right, he now admitted to her that maybe it was his duty to follow after Fred and at least offer to meet him half way in making up the quarrel. Having made this confession, he found the rest quite easy; but

still many minutes passed before he started at last to overtake their friend, Nell accompanying him.

Clay judged it wise to go to the clearing once again before taking up Fred's trail, and Nell was anxious that he do so. Their visit there was in vain, however, and considerable time having thus been consumed, the missing boy had been gone for two hours before the effort to overtake him was fairly commenced.

As Fred had made no effort to cover his trail, the necessity of doing so to avoid Indians not occurring to him, it was easy in most places for Clay to pursue the exact course he had taken. Indeed, the reckless way in which the boy from the east had kicked up the leaves, broken down plants and vines, permitted the heels of his boots to leave their impress upon the soft earth or exposed roots, and even pulled down green leaves from bushes he passed, made his path as easily followed as a rabbit's track in the snow. Only here and there were there stretches where no sign of his trail was seen, but by following the general direction he was pursuing, the trace was soon picked up again.

"We didn't think to bring anything along to eat,"

said Clay, when he and Nell had traveled two or three miles. "Wish we had, because it looks to me as if we were to have an all day's job of it."

"Maybe we can find something to eat along the way," Nell answered. "It is time the May-apples were ripe."

As if some good fairy had answered to the girl's suggestion, the brother and sister did find some of the apples only a few minutes later,—not entirely ripe, but enough so that their rich pulp was quite palatable. Nell pulled one of the slender, broad-leafed plants to hold over her head as an umbrella, and the two hurried on. They walked Indian fashion, one before the other, and their four feet left far fewer traces in the earth and leaves than Fred's two had done.

Time seemed almost to fly, as faster and faster the boy and girl went, still seeing nothing of him they were seeking. Their danger was increasing, too, for every step took them nearer the great trail, and it would not be surprising to come upon a band of Indians at any moment. The scattered sunbeams of the trees, and their changing shadows, indicated where the light filtered through the dense foliage

that the hour of noon had passed. Clay spoke of this.

"And we've got to run, Nell, that's all there is about it. We'll never catch up with that boy, if we don't. I think he's been running some himself."

At a slow run then the brother and sister made greater haste and had gone on in this way until Nell's side was aching so she felt she would have to give up, when Clay, who was in the lead, suddenly stopped.

"Wonder what this means?" he exclaimed.

Before him the leaves were all disturbed and splashed with blood, and leading off squarely to the left was the trail which looked as if it might have been made by the dragging of a bag of meal along the ground.

"Somebody or something's been shot and wounded and just managed to drag away," declared Clay. "No doubt about that, but——"

"Do you think it was Fred, Clay?" Nell whispered.

"Maybe it was, Sis, but he must have hurt himself by accident. See, there is only one trail."

Following rapidly along the blood-stained furrow among the leaves, the boy and girl came in a

few minutes to the brink of a rocky precipice, so high that the tallest trees in the valley beneath were but on a level with their feet. Cautiously they crept near and looked down.

There was Fred, standing on a narrow ledge of earth and rock twenty feet below them, his hands clutching the rough edges of the perpendicular wall against which he squeezed himself to keep from falling. He could go neither backward or forward, so narrow was the cliff on which he stood, and neither could he get up or down. Dizzy and terrified, he seemed to hug the rocks closer and closer.

"Oh, Fred, hold on tight!"

It was Nell's voice, and in all his life long, the boy never forgot how sweetly the unexpected sound rang in his ears. With an effort, he looked up and saw not only Nell, but Clay, gazing down at him.

"Mercy, Fred, I don't see how you ever got down there," Clay cried, in friendly tones. "But hang on; we'll get you up again."

"Faith, I'm glad you came! 'Twas pretty near all over with me. But how am I to get up? I'm about tuckered!"

Fred spoke in gasps, and as Clay hastily viewed

the situation, the problem confronting him did promise to be most difficult. The bank was so steep and so high, that without a stout rope he dared not take the risk of trying to haul Fred up. He thought of cutting his clothing into strips to make a cable, but it would not be strong enough, and a pole would not do, as it would have to be drawn up perpendicularly, hand over hand. Clay himself could have climbed a slender sapling in that way, if he had been in Fred's place, and one were let down to him, but the city boy might not be able to do so, and the risk of making the attempt was too great unless it should be found to be the only way.

"Hold tight, Fred, I have a plan," Clay called at last, and telling Nell to follow close behind him, he ran along the cliff until he came to a spot where the slope, though steep, permitted him to descend into the valley. Nell kept close and without loss of time, they both ran back along the foot of the precipice, until they were just beneath their friend's perilous position.

"Now for a little log or something," said Clay, and after a minute's search, found what he wanted in a pile of drift in the brook. It was a dead, but

strong hickory sapling, torn, roots and all, from the bank of the little stream by some freshet. Quickly the boy trimmed its trunk and cut off its top with his knife, then began climbing a tall elm standing near the foot of the precipice, its topmost branches being but little above Fred's head as he clung to the narrow ledge.

"Pass up that sapling, Nell; I'll have to drag it to the top of the tree," called Clay when he had reached the first forks of the elm, "and hurry!"

Nell hardly needed to be told to hasten, and soon Clay was climbing up and up from limb to limb with both feet and one hand, while in the other hand he drew after him the dead hickory.

In the forks of a large branch, nearly on a level with the ledge where Fred stood, the plucky boy stopped. With an effort, he steadied himself by twining his legs tightly about the large limb, and dragged the sapling up and pushed it along the bough supporting him till its top rested upon the ledge of the cliff a dozen feet distant.

Well as he could, without losing his balance, Fred had been watching. He saw how Clay planned that he should climb from the ledge to the elm by

the aid of the hickory, but scarcely dared to undertake it.

"It's the very best we can do, Fred!"

Clay's words gave the lad courage, and he answered. "I'll try, coz."

Very slowly, Fred relinquished his grasp upon the jagged rocks and earth, and stooped to seize the hickory. It looked a long way from the ledge to the elm, but it was certainly much farther to the foot of the cliff, and with the courage of desperation, though dizzy and trembling, he worked himself out upon the pole, which was bending dangerously beneath his weight.

Lying astride the hickory and holding fast, inch by inch and foot by foot he made his way, and Clay had hold of his clothing at last to help him into the tree, and he knew that he was safe.

CHAPTER XIII.

DOUBLING ON THE TRAIL.

Clay pulled the hickory sapling from the ledge and let it fall to the ground before he and Fred climbed down from the elm, and as it crashed to the earth, Fred said:

"That's how I would have dropped before long if you hadn't come, Clay. Confound it all, I'm sorry I made such a beast of myself this morning; but I won't forget how much I owe you right away, you'll see."

"You don't owe me anything," Clay answered. "It was Nell who said we'd better look you up. She was afraid you'd bump into the redskins along the big trail somewhere. And then again, I was

ashamed for the way I'd acted and driven you off. We'll call it 'even Stephen' if you don't care."

"All right, then, only it ain't even, not yet anyhow."

Nell's first demand was to know how in the world Fred had got into the predicament in which he was found, but before the latter answered, Clay proposed that they go up on the steep hill at the opposite side of the ravine and search for May-apples. They pushed through a thicket in making the ascent and were nearly to the top of the hill, when, happening to look back, Clay dropped to the ground as if he had been shot, making emphatic motions for Fred and Nell to do the same.

All on their knees together, Clay pointed through the dense brush to the top of the cliff they had left but a few minutes before. Two Indians stood there gazing down at the narrow ledge on which Fred had stood.

"They've seen that trail and followed it," said Clay in a whisper.

"My eye! What an escape I had!" came in scared undertones from Fred. "They'd have got me off

that ticklish height rather quicker than you did, Clay; and in a way I wouldn't have relished."

For several minutes the Indians looked down and all about the top of the cliff. Presently a third savage joined them and they walked a little way in each direction along the brink, presently finding the path by which Clay and Nell had descended into the valley. With a little yell they started down the steep slope.

"We've got to cut from here mighty lively," Clay whispered. "Creep on your hands and knees, and when I jump and run, follow me."

With all possible haste the three figures crawled through the brush and among the trees until they were quite out of view from the gully or the cliff. Halting, Clay cautiously rose up, and finding the coast clear, and signalling his companions to follow, made a dash onward swiftly but quietly, Nell close at his heels and Fred not a yard behind.

For more than a mile the flight was kept up before Clay called a halt a second time.

"Now double on the trail," he ordered: "Those bucks will be after us sure if they find our tracks out of the ravine."

Straight back varying not a foot to either side of the course, they had come, the three then ran, Clay leading, as before, and cautioning Fred and Nell not so much as to overturn a leaf if they could avoid it. Nearly a quarter of a mile he led on in this way, then daring to go no further lest the Indians should have found their tracks, and be coming on toward them, he made a broad leap to one side, directing the others to do likewise. With painstaking that they should leave not the least clue to mark the way of their new course, they hurried off at right angles to their original path.

No word was spoken nor an unnecessary sound made as steadily the two boys and Nell hastened on and on. The shadows lengthened, the afternoon was slipping away. Twice Clay had altered the direction in which they traveled, and at last he paused.

"Rest yourselves," he said, quite out of breath himself, the perspiration streaming down his face. "I'll have to find out just where we are."

The truth was that Clay was more nearly lost than he was willing to confess, and considerably puzzled to know in which direction he should turn next. He had been watching the bark on the trees,

knowing that the sides of the trees on which the most moss was seen were towards the north, but now, as the sun was going down it seemed, by this sign, to be setting in the north, also.

"It's strange," the lad reflected, "west is north, or north is west. I never knew the bark and the sun to be so mixed up before."

Nell noticed the worried look upon her brother's face, and Fred, also, was about to speak of it as minute after minute passed and the young leader could do nothing but look around and up and down. And then a bright thought came to Clay's mind. He remembered that at this season when the days were long, the sun would set to the north of straight west, almost in the north-west, in fact, and was in that direction now. Remembering this, he saw that the bark and the sun agreed as to the points of the compass quite as usual, and so to find north, east, west and south was quite easy.

"If we cut off straight east we are bound to come to the ravine before long," Clay announced, brightening. "The gully that we were in is the same as that under our ash only it is deeper and wider farther up. We'd better be moving on."

Fred had been telling Nell about his adventures on the cliff and as Clay was not so wrapped in thought now, he caught a few words.

"Oh, save that till we get home; I want to hear it, too," he begged.

Fred could not well tell more, for now the race through the woods was renewed, nor did Clay slow down to a walk until they reached the edge of the ravine.

"I thought we'd come out pretty near the house," he said, as the three walked down the hillside. "Our tree is down this way a piece."

Clay was right, and ten minutes later, very tired but thankful, indeed, to feel that they were reasonably safe once more, the weary trio crept into the tree-top nest.

Tired as she was, Nell took the kettle to the clear little pool of the brook, at which they obtained water, and filled it. She was hot and thirsty and knew the others were the same.

"What a dear, good girl!" said Fred, approvingly, taking a long drink.

And while they rested, he began again the story of his adventure. He had no thought of where he

was going when he started away, he was so angry, he said; but as he hurried along, the idea came to him to try to find the Moravian Mission, which, Clay had told him a day or two before, was not far away.

"I knew from what you said," Fred stated, "that I could not stay there long,—that they would not be allowed to harbor refugees, but I thought I might get a bite to eat from them and find out the nearest way to some settlement."

"You were going in exactly the wrong direction to get to the Moravians," Clay was on the point of saying, but thinking this would not be kind, said nothing while Fred continued:

"I tripped along at a good gait, going straight north, as well as I could judge, and keeping an eye open for Indians. I had no trouble and was forgetting to be on the watch, when I heard a growl like a bass fiddle, and just ahead of me saw a bear. The fellow didn't show fight and I s'pose I should have quietly got out of the way and gone around the brute, but instead I pulled a pistol and blazed away. I was so close that I don't know how I could have made such a bad shot, but all I did, so

far as I could see, was to pepper the bear's hind legs. Maybe I broke some bones. He turned on me and I cut. But his ugliness didn't come after me, and directly I went back and saw how he had dragged himself away—dragged one leg and maybe two. I followed the trail to the edge of that precipice where you found me. There was quite a broad ledge twenty feet or so down, and at a place not quite straight up, master bear had crawled down to it and gone along to some cave, I imagine. So I slid down to the ledge, too, and was going along smooth as pie, for it was plenty wide then. But the bear, not controlling his heavy body, and falling on the ledge about like a dead weight, I s'pose, followed by my jumping down upon the shelf, as it were, caused the trouble. All of a heap, nearly the whole ledge cracked and fell, making an awful din, and there was I perched on a place a little wider than your hand or two hands, maybe! I just saved myself as I saw the crack under my feet getting wider, but I couldn't get back to the place where I had slid down, because the shelf broke off close to the wall there. It was a pretty pickle, I tell you! If you two hadn't come along

I'd have had to give up and tumble—I couldn't have kept from falling a great while longer, even if those Indians had missed me."

"Oh, I'm so glad the Indians didn't find you," Nell exclaimed, heartily.

"Why, so am I, now I think of it," said Fred with a happy smile.

"And so am I; and do you think we dare kindle enough fire to get a cooked supper?" said Clay.

"I'm about starved," Fred replied.

"You must go to the clearing and look for father before it is any darker, Clay," Nell urged, after a little further conversation about Fred's adventure, and the supper. And then she agreed to kindle a very small fire and broil some venison, while he performed this daily, now well nigh hopeless task.

As Clay walked to the clearing, he was thinking what a change there had been in Fred. He had told the story of his wounding and following the bear, and of all that followed, without the least bragging. And he had spoken not one word of complaint all afternoon, though he must have been so tired he could hardly stand, his bones and muscles being still unaccustomed to such vigorous work.

"I'll have to remember, though, that he has never been used to rough living," Clay told himself. "He's not a half bad fellow."

Fred's thoughts during the great-part of the long run through the woods had naturally been of his fortunate deliverance from death, and in his heart he knew that Clay and Nell had saved his life. The little girl he liked more and more, she was so gentle and kind, and so pretty, too; and her brother, though sensitive and quick-tempered, he had found generally willing to be agreeable if others made an effort to be the same. The result of Fred's reflections was, that he caused Nell much surprise by gathering dry wood for her while, with flint and the iron of the shovel to make sparks and with some punk in which to catch the tiny flashes of flame, she started a bright blaze, as the coals of the morning fire had been neglected and had died out, as a result of the quarrel.

Clay returned from the clearing with no news, and though more and more worried he expressed the hope that Mr. Castle might come the following day. All ate heartily of the venison, and when their

supper was over, fell to talking of plans for the immediate future.

Nell and Clay agreed that they must wait near the clearing for some time to come, for their father might arrive any day, and Fred made no objection. For the latter's benefit, chiefly, however, Clay said that if they found themselves unable to bear the diet of meat, alone, they would try to make their way to the Moravian Mission, and beg some corn or vegetables.

"I saw wild bees on the blackberry blossoms today. I've heard of there being bee-trees in the woods. Is it all a myth, or isn't it?" Fred remarked.

"Not a bit of it; there are bee-trees and I shouldn't be surprised if there were some near here. I heard Panther Dilly tell of seeing one last summer. I know how to find the trees, too, but I'm afraid it's early in the season to get much honey."

"Unless the bees had some left over from last year," Nell suggested.

"'Pon my oath, I'll be learning so much about bees and wild animals and the woods, to say nothing of the Indians, that I'll be astonishing everybody with my knowledge when I get back home," laughed

Fred. "Even father will not know more. Are there any old ruins in the woods—old castles of the Indians, or anything of that sort?"

"Why, not around here," said Clay. "Of course, you know that the Aztecs—the Indians of Mexico—had houses that are sometimes called castles, I think, but the Mingoes and Delawares, Shawnees, Wyandots, Chippewas,—none of the Indians around here or in the northwest country, ever had more than wigwams and cabins. The old Six Nations, the Iroquois, have a good deal better houses than the tribes I named, or any others, unless it be the Cherokees; but they are only log and bark houses or cabins, at that."

"The reason I asked is that I heard father say, as he was talking to some men at Fort Pitt, that he was looking for an old castle or something like that. I didn't pay much attention and never remembered to ask him what he meant. Father isn't very talkative, and I don't know what he has in mind, half the time, unless I ask him. Why, you'd hardly believe it, but I didn't know we were coming west until the day before we started."

"Anyway, you found some Castles, Fred," Nell laughed. "But they are not old ones."

"And there's no other kind west of the Ohio or north of it," Clay added.

"But the more I think of it, the surer I am that Father used the word castle," Fred insisted.

And time proved that he was right.

CHAPTER XIV.

FINDING A BEE-TREE.

The warm June night passed without incident, as did likewise the day which followed, save for a downpour of rain just before morning. Much thunder and lightning and a high wind accompanied the storm. The gale so swayed the trees and bent their branches that sleep in the nest in the creaking ash was quite out of the question, but in their leafy bower, the boys and Nell suffered but little. Even the rain did not find them out to any uncomfortable extent, and when, early in the forenoon, the sun came out splendorously, the rain was found to have been a blessing. In the first place, it obliterated all the plainest traces of the presence of the three young people in the woods, and left the puri-

fied air of the forest sweet with the odor of flowers and other wild vegetation.

True, until the sun and breezes had dried the ground and damp tree trunks and leaves, the atmosphere was too moist to be wholesome, but by afternoon even the most shaded places were dry and clean.

Another visit to the clearing resulted only as so many others had done, in disappointment. However worried Clay may have been concerning Mr. Castle's absence, Fred, on his own account was far less anxious. That his own father was safe seemed quite a settled conviction in his mind.

"And what a jolly surprise I will give my respected sire, when I march in upon him at Fort Pitt or Philadelphia, or somewhere," he sometimes said.

With fishing and hunting, the trapping of some turkeys, gathering of the wild strawberries and edible roots, and frequent visits to the clearing, the days passed. The two boys quarreled no more, though they did not wholly agree at all times. Fred learned to be appreciative and generous, and Clay, finding him anxious to show his gratitude, was ever

willing to exert himself to make all things as mutually pleasant as circumstances permitted.

Fred and Nellie became the best of friends. The lad from the city found much to admire in the bright, pretty ways of the little backwoods girl, and wondered how he could ever have had the impression that the people of the frontier were but semi-civilized. Though so young, her understanding was so quick, her sympathies so ready, that he made her his confidante in a great many things of which he never spoke to Clay. Often he told her, as they chanced to be by themselves, of the school he had attended, of fights between Whig and Tory boys, of the girls he knew and those he liked best, and what he had seen and done when on a visit to London with his father.

In return, Nell spoke of her life in the woods, the happy days before the Indian uprising, of her mother's constant care to teach her and her brother, and her wish that she might have greater advantages. She did not care to live in the city, she said; indeed, her dream of happiness, to be realized when a young lady, was to have a nice home such as she had seen sometimes in eastern Pennsylvania—con-

venient to the towns and yet possessing all the freedom and unlimited out-of-door life which only the country could afford. She wished to learn singing and other accomplishments, to have some nice books, a few nice gowns, and her father and mother and Clay with her, though for the latter she planned, in a girlish way, sometimes that he should be a great soldier, sometimes that he should be a doctor.

"Mother wants him to be a preacher,—a Presbyterian preacher," she said one day. "But I do not believe Clay will be a preacher, and besides, that time is a long way off and we will be poorer than ever now. And now, this very day, I'd be so happy if only Papa and Mother were safe and we were all together again! I could just cry and cry, but it would do no good."

As the days slipped by, the fare the forest afforded became quite unpleasantly monotonous and Nell and Fred both reminded Clay of his proposal to find a bee-tree; and he said one evening grumbling over a turkey bone, though even Fred had made no complaint:

"Tomorrow we'll have some honey; see if we don't."

To find among millions of trees, one in which the wild honey-bees had made a home and hidden their stores, looked to Fred like a search for a needle in a haystack; but he was anxious to do his part. Clay, however, did not for a moment doubt his ability to find a tree if one were in the vicinity.

"It would be easy if we only had some maple sugar, or a little honey to start with," he said. "As it is, we'll have to use flowers, and cowslip blossoms will be the easiest to get."

Together the boys and Nell went next morning to a swampy place near the creek where several times they had picked cowslips for "greens," and gathered in their hats and hands a quantity of the delicate, yellow flowers of the plant. Carrying these, under Clay's guidance, to a somewhat open glade, they placed the blossoms on a log and retired a little way to watch and wait.

In time, one little bee was seen hovering over the flowers, and soon another, and another came.

"It is our lucky day," Clay whispered. "Watch close which way they go, for it will be in a straight line to the bee-tree."

"Now I know what a bee-line is; 'pon oath, I

never knew before," Fred said in low tones to Nell, and both laughed softly. Clay glanced at them in a knowing way, and in his mind was the thought that it is strange how a boy and girl will laugh together sometimes, there being really nothing to laugh at.

In a minute or two Clay hastily jumped up and started off to the north saying, "Look sharp, now, you two, and each of you choose a bee as they fly away and follow it as far as you can." His own eyes were vigilantly watching a bee, as he spoke, and hurried away.

"There goes one," Nell whispered, and she was quickly hastening on after her brother.

Fred soon followed, also, watching as closely as he could a little black speck, which seemed to move through the air and among the trees without effort or noise. He had gone but a few yards, however, when a root caught his foot, and though he extricated himself in a second, he could not see the bee when again he looked up.

There was nothing for it but to abandon the pursuit, and hurry forward to join Clay and Nell, and this Fred did. By the time he had overtaken Nellie, she, too, had lost her bee, and they went on to-

gether. A little way ahead was Clay and the bee he had tried to follow had also escaped him.

"We'll have to try again," he said, as the others came up. "We are running more or less risk chasing around the woods this way, and we must keep our eyes sharp for more than bees. But come on, we'll give them another game, and see if they beat us this time."

Returning to the heap of cowslip blossoms on the log, Clay gathered them up and led the way off toward the northeast.

"But why don't you carry the flowers straight ahead to the place where you last saw your bee?" asked Fred.

"You'll see pretty soon," was the answer. "The bee-tree may be a mile away and we don't want to be all day finding it."

At a favorable place, fifty or sixty rods from the place where they had first been placed, the wilting blossoms were again spread out upon a log and again the honey hunters awaited developments.

"Now you see," said Clay, "the bees will have to go in a different direction this time to reach their tree; and where the line they follow this time meets

the line they followed before, right on that spot the honey is hidden. Don't you see?"

Fred's face wore a puzzled look, but Nell, grasping the point at once, exclaimed gently:

"Why, yes, we will have all three sides of a triangle—the two lines the bees make and the line we ourselves made coming from that other log to this. And the bee-tree is at the point of the triangle."

"Oh, of course," Fred quickly replied, understanding the plan now, "and all we have to do is to make a good guess where the bee-lines come together, which is the point of the triangle. But even that is easier said than done," he added after a moment's reflection.

"Mostly guess-work unless you are pretty clever in arithmetic," said Clay.

After a time the bees found the flowers which were to be the means of robbing them of their store, and it was not long until Clay, Fred, and Nell were traveling in a northwesterly direction, each following a bee as best he might; and as before, each in time, lost sight of the speck of black on which he tried to keep his eyes.

"We must keep right on in a straight line," Clay

announced. He looked up through the leaves at the sun, wet his finger at his lips, and held it up to learn the exact direction of the little breeze which filtered through the thick foliage and underbrush—the wind cooling most quickly that side of the finger toward which it came. Getting his bearings in this way, that he might pursue as straight a line as possible, Clay started on, Fred and Nell following. Repeatedly the young leader looked skyward and again and again noted the direction of the wind; for it was not an easy matter to keep in a straight line through the trackless woods, stepping out of the right course so many times to go around big trees or dense thickets, and so they traveled nearly a mile.

"Right near here, somewhere," Clay declared, halting at last, "is where the bee-lines come together. We'll see if it isn't."

Following instructions, Nell and Fred had carried the flowers forward and they were now placed on a dry little knoll where a warm sunbeam fell, and the watching and waiting began again.

Soon the bees came and in greater numbers than before, causing Clay to exclaim gladly:

"I knew we were not far off! We'll find the tree this time."

And he was right. The bees flew away in nearly the same direction as that from which the young hunters had come, showing that Clay had gone too far, passing the point of the triangle, before calling a halt. He had not greatly miscalculated, however, for suddenly running off, following a bee as before, he had gone but a few hundred feet when he called back:

"Here's the tree, all right; and the nest is in a big limb!"

Much interested in the clever manner in which the honey had been located, Fred stood for some time looking up at the buzzing, busy specks of black that flew in and out at a big knot-hole.

"But we didn't bring the ax," said Nell in disappointed tones.

"We won't dare cut the tree down or cut the limb off till night, anyhow—unless we want to get stung a good many times," Clay answered. "We haven't a thing to put over our heads and faces and hands. In the dark, the bees won't be very lively at the worst."

As it was now noon it was proposed to mark the bee-tree and its location and return home; then when it was nearly sundown, return again to the spot.

"And we must make some bark trays to put the honey in," said Nell. "I can't spare the kettle, except that we might carry the honey home in that, and we haven't anything else."

Acting upon the suggestion of the wise little housekeeper, all three, after a dinner of venison, devoted their time to fashioning vessels of bark. The material for these was not easily obtained as midsummer was drawing near and the bark clung closely to the trees, still a half dozen rough, canoe-shaped receptacles were contrived, and Fred and Nell carrying these while Clay carried his rifle, the the kettle and ax, and some dry hickory bark for torches, they set out for the bee-tree an hour before sunset.

While it was still light enough, so that he could see well, Clay climbed up and cut away the branches of two smaller trees, which might interfere with the fall of the great limb of the bee-tree in which the honey was. Then he climbed up to

the honey limb. The bee-tree was a poplar of good size and he climbed it with difficulty. The ax he drew up after him by a long string of deerskin fastened to its handle.

Fred and Nell kindled a very small fire on a flat stone placed in the end of a hollow log,—just enough to provide a flame at which to light the torches, when they should be needed, and then there was nothing to do but wait.

In considerable numbers at first, then more slowly, the bees were returning for the night. Until sundown, many of them circled about in the soft air just outside the knot-hole, then went inside at last. A few late-comers crept into the nest as the twilight gathered, but by the time it was so dark that Nell and Fred could no longer see Clay, perched in a fork of the poplar, from near which point the honey limb branched out, every bee was within.

"Keep from under it, now; I'm going to begin," Clay quietly called, and presently the sound of his ax was heard.

"I'm glad it's a poplar tree; they're so much easier to chop than oak, or almost any other kind except basswood," Nell whispered.

"I didn't know that; faith, I would not have thought of it," Fred answered. "What a lot there is to learn that can't be found in school books!"

Steadily Clay chopped away. Of necessity, in his cramped position, and to keep his balance, he worked slowly, but in due time the big limb came crashing down.

"Look out, here comes the ax!" he called in cautious tones, and let it drop to the ground, following that useful tool himself by the slower but safer route of the poplar's trunk.

"Now for a torch!"

At once, a strip of hickory bark was lighted, and by its flaring light the big limb was found to be unbroken. A few swift blows with the ax in strong, knowing hands, however, split the wood squarely in two and the spilled contents of the honeycombs, lay in the two halves of the limb, and trickled slowly over their sides, shining beautifully in the wavy light.

Bewildered and dazed, some bees flew here and there distractedly, others crept over the broken limb or along the ground.

"Don't mind them; one or two stings won't hurt

much, anyhow," said Clay, and, Nell holding the torch, he and Fred scooped up the honey with their hands, with the vessels of bark, and almost any way in their haste, until the kettle and four of the bark troughs were filled.

"Wish we had brought the trap along; we could most likely catch a bear, if we had," said Clay, as they worked, "Never mind that; a little soft mud on it when we get home will fix it all right"—this as Fred jumped and squirmed, suddenly feeling a sharp pain on his neck and another on his hand the next instant.

"There will be bears here after what honey we don't get, as soon as they smell it," Clay went on; "maybe it won't be too late to set the trap to-morrow—Ouch!—tomorrow night."

"Never mind that, a little soft mud will fix it all right," said Fred, guessing what Clay's "ouch" meant, and Nell laughed merrily.

"I wouldn't mind if we were to have company now," said the little girl, as they all trudged along through the dark woods. "'Twould be nicer though, if we had some warm biscuits."

"I' faith, that would be fine," said Fred.

"But there isn't much danger of having company —except the kind we don't want," Clay put in. "Judging by the way the wolves are howling to-night, we may have a visit from them."

Sooner than any member of the little party expected, they did have a visitor, however, and it was not the wolves, nor was it an Indian.

CHAPTER XV.

PANTHER DILLY BRINGS NEWS.

Many days passed and nothing was seen or heard of Mr. Castle. Once a prowling Indian passed nearby, and one day the trail of a large party of the savages was found not far north of the clearing.

"There must be trouble all along the border," said Clay, commenting on the discovery of this trail. "I don't know but we are safer in the tree then we would be any place else."

Nell felt that to leave their nest and forsake the daily watching for Mr. Castle would be to acknowledge a belief that he had been killed or captured by the savages; and, though she feared that such might be the mournful truth, she could not think of admitting as much, even to herself.

She and Clay and Fred were seated in the nest together after a meager breakfast of fried fish, when the brother spoke, as quoted, but she could make no reply.

Fred was becoming more and more anxious to try to reach Fort Pitt or some other settlement, and did not relish the thought of remaining indefinitely where they were.

"The worst of it is," he said, "that we may stay here till we have no powder left and then we would hardly dare leave if we wanted to. We might write a note on bark or something and tie it to a post in the clearing where your father would find it, saying that you have gone to Fort Pitt."

This seemed a wise suggestion, but Clay was unwilling to accept it at once.

"If we hadn't lost track of the days at the beginning, we'd know just what day this is," he said, and added, as he saw the others wondering what he meant. "I was only thinking that we might agree to stay here till August, and then if father had not come, we'd start for—some place."

"If we stay that long, we may as well stay longer,"

said Nell. "The new potatoes and the corn will be big enough to use by that time."

"My very respectable father will not recognize his amiable son; I am looking more like an Indian every day," laughed Fred. "But, 'pon honor, we can't remain here forever! King George may have hanged every Whig in Philadelphia, even now, and we'd know nothing about it if he had."

"I am right glad you were not there if he has done that," said Nell, cheerily.

"Not a Tory in the colonies would have dared so much as to think of such a thing, if Fred had been there," laughed Clay, making light of the discontent of the lad from the east, as he had often done before, rallying him to a merrier mood.

But to Fred's credit, it must be said, that he very seldom complained, though the rough life, poor food, and monotony of thus living in the woods, made him at times most unhappy—wretchedly homesick. Unconsciously, however, he was learning to bear pain and hardship without a groan, and his boastful vanity had quite disappeared, though his high-strung spirit was unshaken. In all he was a braver, wiser boy than he had been six weeks

before; not that he had lacked courage at any time, but his natural daring was now of the calmer, better sort—the kind which endures an internal ache without a murmur as well as it faces a real danger without flinching.

Except for fishing and the trapping of such game as they needed for food, there was little for the boys and Nell to do to occupy the time, often hanging heavily upon their hands. It was in the midst of this real affliction of idleness that Clay thought of a plan which met with the hearty approval of his companions, and, indirectly, had a most important bearing upon their future adventures.

"Let's make a canoe," he said one day; and five minutes later, all were on their way to the creek bottoms in search of a bitternut hickory tree whose trunk should be straight and whose bark must be free from knot-holes.

"I supposed the savages always used birch bark," said Fred, as they were prospecting.

"Not around here," Clay answered. "It is nearly always the bitternut hickory or the red elm. You don't often find birch trees in these woods."

A tree of the kind desired was found, after some

search, on a sloping hillside, but, much to the disappointment of all, the bark would not peel. This discovery was made by cutting into the trunk near the ground, so that the portion of the bark desired should not be injured, if it could be used; but the bark split and stuck fast and nothing could be done with it.

"We'll have a canoe anyway," declared Clay. "We'll make a dugout. It will be a tedious task, but we have time enough. Why, we have more time than anything else!"

"I' faith, there's no doubt of that, I think," Fred laughed. "But the days are getting shorter now," he added, slyly, and Nell smiled, much amused.

"But we'll make a dugout, never mind," Clay returned, also smiling at the witticism, though its shaft was directed at himself; and he led the way in search of a basswood or poplar of the right size and straight of trunk and free from knots. A tree of the latter species was selected, and Clay was soon at work to chop it down.

"We're luckier than the Indians used to be before they had axes, anyway," he observed after a time, pausing to wipe the perspiration from his

face. "They used to have to cut their tree down by burning it and cutting the charred parts away as fast as they formed, with sharp stones."

"But they had more time than anything else, too," Fred answered.

"What a wit you're getting to be, Fred!" Clay exclaimed, and went on with his work.

The young Philadelphian offered to wield the ax a while, but Clay would have none of it.

"Because," he said, with feigned superiority, "it needs a true eye and a knowing stroke to fell a tree just right. Why, I've seen men work at a clearing, and chop a hundred trees or more all but down, in just such a way that when the last tree was cut clear off and fell, it went against the next tree so as to knock it down, and make the second also knock down a third, the third the fourth one, and so on, to the very last. And then there were all the trees together in so perfect a row that fire set to one of them, burned up all the rest."

"Indeed, that is quite true," said Nell, as Fred looked incredulous, Clay resuming his work meanwhile. "We people in the backwoods do all sorts of things to make the work go fast."

"Because you have so little time?" asked the city boy with a laugh, and added: "Bless me, though, I think you must need to make haste with every task, for it must keep one pretty busy just going to the settlements and back again, for whatever you have to—provisions and the like. Four days did you say, for each trip?"

"Oh, we do not go every day. It isn't fashionable to be constantly running back and forth to the trades-people," smiled Nell.

"Be ready to jump," Clay cried just a little later, "this tree may take a notion to go the wrong way!"

However, the boy with the ax had cut in so deeply on one side—the side toward which he wished the tree to fall—leaving enough of an uncut corner at one edge to swing the trunk around somewhat out of its natural bent, that when the poplar did go down, it fell just as he wished it to do. He stood beside the stump, pointing out to Fred how he had managed to land the heavy tree in the very place in which he wished it to lie, and prevent the top from lodging in any of the surrounding trees, when a voice close at hand caused him suddenly to jump, startling Nell and Fred no less:

"Wondered who was choppin' away so hard!"

"Hello here! Why, it's Panther Dilly!"

Immensely relieved as he wheeled about to find that the strange voice came from a white person, and no less pleased to discover that the speaker was the hunter and trader whom he knew, Clay found his own voice at once.

"That's me," the newcomer replied to the boy's salutation, "an' here's my paw."

He held out his hand which each of the boys and Nell grasped in turn.

"What ye doin? Goin' to manyfacture a dugout, be ye?"

"Yes," Clay answered—"but Panther, tell us, have you seen anything of our father? Did you know our cabin was burned, and Mr. Rose's, too, the very day after you stopped to talk with father?"

"Aye, I know that to my sorrer; but, sorry to say it, I don't know nothin' 'bout yer folks. Terrible doin's goin' on! I vum, I never thought to see the like! Every young buck in the northwest kentry in paint an' feathers, an' all along o' those good-fer-nothin' Virginians! An' me as has traded 'mongst the Mingoes an' all the rest, took prisoner,

an' runnin' away from the rascals this minute—I vum, I never thought to see the like!"

"Mr. Dilly, I saw you a prisoner, your hands tied and——"

"Aye, so ye did, Sissy, an' I seen you too, peekin' out o' the ash an' the wil' grape-vines. I vum, I was scared to think the Injuns might get a glimpse of ye! 'At's one reason why I come back this way—wanted to look ye up. An' yer makin' a dugout, be ye? Goin' to skedaddle in it?"

The woodsman,—he was thirty-five or forty years old—was dressed entirely in buckskin. He was hatless, and his unkempt hair and scratched and dirt-stained hands and face, sadly soiled clothing, and frayed moccasins gave him a wild appearance. He took a seat on the poplar stump, as he addressed his questions to Clay, and the latter answered:

"Father went away the morning after you brought the news of the danger, to see how matters stood. That same day the Indians came. Nell and I were down at the natural clearing and found the buildings afire and mother gone, and Joe Rose also killed or carried off; I——"

"An' how'd you git so fur from home, youngster?"

Dilly interrupted Clay to ask this question of Fred. His manner was so blunt and uncouth, that the young Philadelphian's eyes flashed and a tart answer came to his lips; but before he could speak, Clay hastened to prevent any unpleasantness, by saying:

"Panther Dilly has sharp eyes, Fred, and he knew that your clothes were not of the backwoods kind. Fred Fravel's our friend's name, Panther, and the Indians surrounded a party of landmen that he and his father were with. He got away and found us."

"Ain't from Virginia, be ye?" Panther asked.

"I am from Philadelphia, since you care to know," said Fred, coolly.

"Glad o' that, I vum!" Panther went on. "The Virginia fellers are at the bottom of this whole row. I would as soon put some holes in some of 'em as not. W'y, ain't it a pretty nest o' hornets they've ben stirrin' up around our ears, though? They might 'a knowed what'd happen if Logan, an' Cornstalk, too, got riled up. An' there's no tellin' where it'll end!"

In vain, did Clay and Nell ply the woodsman with questions concerning the probable whereabouts of their parents; but Fred was too proud to make any inquiry of this fellow, who seemed to him so rude and so unnecessarily offensive in speech and in manner. Yet he listened carefully to all that was said.

Dilly told briefly how he had been captured by a war party when on his way to Fort Pitt from the Sandusky Plains. He had supposed himself to be safe, being known as a trader and as a Pennsylvanian and not a Virginian, for the wrath of the savages was directed chiefly against the Virginia Long-Knives. But he was accused of acting as a spy and badly treated. He had been taken south along the Muskingum river where the party of Indians he was with joined others near the Indian town of Wakatomaka. Runners had brought news that a large party of Long-Knives was approaching and most of the Indians hurried forward to lie in ambush for the enemy. Being left without a strong guard, Dilly secured the freedom of his hands that he might feed himself, and improved an early oppor-

tunity to seize his rifle, knock two of the Indians down, and take to his heels.

He told the three friends of a most bitter warfare that was being waged all along the border, and said that great quantities of ammunition were being quietly secured at Fort Detroit by the Indians; that nearly every savage capable of carrying a gun was on the warpath in most bitter earnest. He attributed all the trouble to the killing of Logan's relatives and other Indians by the man Greathouse and by Col. Cresap and his Virginia associates and expressed the belief that, while Virginia alone would be looked to for a settlement of the trouble, it was likely to involve Pennsylvania as well.

Panther Dilly was mistaken, as was Logan, the great chief, and many others at the time, in supposing that Col. Cresap had been guilty of the outrage which brought on this Indian war. It was Greathouse and his friends who killed the kin of Logan; and though Col. Cresap had made an attack on some other Indians, his provocation was very great. The Virginians had suffered greatly at the hands of the Indians, especially from the raids which daring Shawnee braves were almost constantly making

upon their frontier. Pennsylvanians blamed the whole trouble upon the people of Virginia, and especially did traders, such as Panther Dilly, whose business was destroyed and lives endangered, find fault with the Virginia government for ordering war upon the savages.

As Dilly talked, Fred longed to ask to accompany him to Fort Pitt, but his pride kept him from doing so. Clay, however, suggested to the woodsman that it might be wise for Nellie, Fred and himself to join him and leave the woods. They had all gone to the tree-top nest, now, and Panther had eaten nearly all that remained of the honey and nearly all other food the larder afforded, while he talked.

"Nope," he said, in reply to Clay's proposal. "The's a quicker an' better way fer you three to git into safe quarters an' find out 'bout yer folks. The Shawnee express that come nigh up to Wakatomaka said that a reg'lar army of Long-Knives was almost there. Now, there wa'n't but a good handful o' the redskins, an' there ain't a mite o' doubt but what they lit out after the first skirmish. An' the Long-Knives will shorely be comin' right

up on the crick. 'Tany rate, if ye git yer dugout finished right smart, an' git in an' float down river, ye'll ketch up with the Virginians in two or three days, even if they've started on back, 'stead o' comin' on up to the Big Trail as they're apter-n not to do."

"I guess we better do that, then," reflected Clay aloud.

"Look sharp every minute, an' don't go hackin' down trees like ye would inside a stockade," the woodsman admonished. "I heerd yer ax a goin' a mile away, a'most." In another minute he was gone.

Had Panther Dilly known then, as he learned afterward, that Col. Angus McDonald and his men, who were the army of which the Indian runner told, had returned south immediately after destroying Wakatomaka and one other Indian town, leaving the country still full of savages, more hostile than ever, he would not so readily have advised his young friends as he did. It is true that Col. McDonald took with him three Indians as hostages, but the great majority of the savages of the vicinity were unharmed; and, indeed, by stratagem, they

had succeeded in removing their women and children and most of their property from the towns McDonald burned, before the white men reached them.

CHAPTER XVI.

DOWN RIVER IN A DUGOUT.

When Dilly had departed, Clay, Fred and Nell spent an hour or more talking of the information he had brought.

Nell felt certain that Mr. Castle, learning in some way of the attack upon the two lonely cabins, had helped to assemble the men who had come up the Muskingum to fight the savages in their principal towns in that region. If this were true, they had but to find that little army to be with him; and, moreover, was it not likely that Mr. Castle would now come to the clearing in search of his family?

The girl's reasoning seemed sound to Fred, and Clay said little against her hopeful supposition; but in his own mind was the thought that Nell's

belief was too good to be true. Nearly two months had now passed, and if his father had been living, and in a position to enlist the aid of others in marching against the Indians, he surely would have arrived long ago. However, the lad agreed that all three should take turns in watching near the clearing, lest Mr. Castle should come and be gone again without being seen, and meanwhile continue work on the canoe as rapidly as possible.

There was much to be done during the next few days. From having more time than anything else, the boys, and Nell, too, found that they must begin early and work late if they hoped to have their craft completed and afloat in time to find the Virginians of whom Panther Dilly had told them, in case their father or these forces did not come to them. There were provisions to be secured, also, and at least two paddles to be whittled out.

Nearly a whole day was required for Clay to hew the poplar log into the desired shape for a canoe about fourteen feet long, but that task completed, two of the little party were constantly busy thereafter, one with the ax, another with a knife, cutting and digging, always most carefully lest they split

the log, to hollow it out until only a strong shell remained.

Hiding in the bushes where she had hidden on the day the cabins were burned, Nell did most of the work of watching for the coming of Mr. Castle or any other men from the invading army. Quietly but busily, Clay and Fred worked upon the dugout. They might have hastened the task by the use of fire, but the green wood would have made so much smoke that the plan could not be considered.

The close of each day brought disappointment in that no sign of the Virginians or Mr. Castle had been discovered, with all their constant watchfulness, but to compensate for this was the knowledge that work on the canoe had made much progress.

The evening of the third day after Panther Dilly's visit found the pirogue and two stout ash paddles completed. The little craft was given a trial in a pool of the creek and found to float admirably. With a little additional trimming on one side, too, Clay made the dugout balance evenly in the water, and there remained nothing to do but get some provisions together, then float the canoe by way of the creek to the river, and there embark.

"Wonder where we will sleep tomorrow night," said Clay, as with Nell and Fred he ate supper in the tree-top house for the last time. "In the dug-out, I s'pose, for we must travel by night when we can."

"What a crew we will have!" exclaimed Fred, glad to be leaving the woods at last,—for truth to tell, the lad's homesickness had been growing, though he complained not. "Only the captain and mates,—no sailors at all! And we ought to name the boat, too. You are the one to do that, Nell."

"We will name her—you always call a boat her, or she, don't you?—we will name her the Mary Moore, that was Mother's name before she was married."

"Why, I've heard father speak of a Mary Moore—someone he used to know; and your mother lived in Philadelphia, didn't she?"

"I wonder if it was she your father knew?"

"Maybe so, but there are a good many people in Philadelphia."

"And it isn't an uncommon name," put in Clay. "But I don't see why you make it the Mary Moore. Just the Mary is better."

"Call her the Lady Mary; there's more style in that," Fred suggested, and this name being adopted, the Lady Mary, by noon of the following day, was ready for her maiden voyage—the first and last that her builders were ever to make in her.

In the field in the clearing, Nell found two or three dozen ears of corn large enough to eat, if one did not mind the kernels being very soft and milky, and Clay obtained at the natural clearing more than a peck of new potatoes,—not larger than walnuts, but still good to eat.

"For meat, we will catch fish as we go along," the young captain said, and a little bark box of bait was provided.

The kettle and frying pan, the bit of carpet, the jar of salt, the bear-trap and other desirable property from the house in the ash were carried away as the voyagers said good-bye to their home, and hopefully, yet a little sadly, marched to the creek.

Clay and Nell could not but think of the tremendous change the summer had brought to their lives; and there is no doubt that each secretly feared that in leaving the only home they had, they were severing the last tie between themselves and their

earlier lives, save those of memory. Fred was in more buoyant spirits, but even with his light-heartedness, there was mingled a feeling of fear—an alarm for his father's safety, which had increased since Panther Dilly's visit.

Towing and pushing the laden pirogue, lifting it over fallen logs, or carrying it around obstructions of driftwood, Clay and Fred worked industriously down the creek toward the river, Nell carrying the rifle and keeping ever within her brother's reach. Thus was the Muskingum reached at last.

Fred's "aye, aye sir!" and similar expressions, which he had picked up during his trip to England, helped keep the little company in a merry mood, as they boarded their craft and pushed out to midstream. Unfortunately Clay had had little experience at wielding a paddle and Fred had had less; but by kneeling down, Clay in the prow and Fred in the stern of the canoe, and paddling, one on one side and one on the other, they found they could make fair progress.

Nell sat "amidships," as Fred expressed it, and did her part by helping to keep the dugout right side up. This was no small matter, especially until

all became accustomed to the pirogue's remarkable whims and fancies, for without the least provocation, apparently, the craft careened from one side to another and all but capsized at such frequent and irregular intervals that the occupants were constantly in wonder to know what the next sudden movement would be. All might be going with entire smoothness and the three sailors remaining perfectly still, they thought, when suddenly the Lady Mary would lurch to one side, dip a cupful of water, perhaps, and then as suddenly lurch still more violently and dip more water on the other side.

"Faith, I'd like to be two score leagues or so at sea in this bark, and the wind blowing a gale!" cried Fred, with irony, as for the tenth time in as many minutes, Nell saved the canoe from going over completely by leaning quickly and heavily toward the higher side when the dugout lurched this way or that.

To watch and guard against the pirogue's antics, however, were not the only things the young voyagers had to do. No less vigilantly must both banks of the stream and their course before and behind be sharply scrutinized. They were upon a

highway that the Indians regularly traveled, and with all the excitement along the border, the savages would be coming and going in unusual numbers. Even if the army of invaders of which Panther Dilly had given information should be coming on straight up stream, the redmen might be fleeing ahead of the Long-Knives and would not hesitate to pause to improve so favorable an opportunity of taking three scalps.

An odd, but interesting and pretty picture the canoe and its occupants presented, as the frail craft drifted with the current or answered the less sluggish force of the paddles, sweeping forward with many starts and twists and turnings from side to side, due largely to the inexperience of those who provided the chief motive power. Nell's sunbonnet had fallen in her lap and stray locks of her brown hair tumbled about her ears. Her eyes danced with the vigor and excitement of her task of maintaining the balance, and her parted red lips gave just a glimpse of pretty white teeth. Each hand clenched a gunwale of the canoe tightly.

Clay sat with his back toward his sister, his paddle over the right side of the pirogue, while he

pulled a long, steady stroke; or, going too near the bank of the stream, pushed off from the shallow water. His hair grown long, his worn beaver, buckskin breeches and coarse homespun shirt, minus one sleeve, and rather ragged, gave him a picturesque, not to say grotesque appearance, which the slight frown about his eyes, as he looked from shore to shore, or up and down the stream, emphasized.

Fred, on his knees in his finer, but sadly damaged clothing, his paddle over the left side of the canoe, his dark, auburn hair long and shaggy beneath his battered cocked hat, his sleeves rolled up to the elbow, revealing tanned, muscular arms, a handkerchief about his neck, his pistols in the holsters at his belt, his snapping blue eyes missing nothing, might have been taken for the son of some eminent soldier learning the ways of the wilderness. He looked like a pirate, Clay said.

In the prow of the craft, close to Clay's hands was the rifle. The carpet was placed for Nell to kneel or sit upon, the boys having each a piece of deerskin for this purpose. Just behind the girl and in front of Fred, were the kettle, ax, bear trap, and

other articles from the tree-top house, all fastened to a cross bar of the canoe that they might not be lost if the pirogue upset.

The brown water swept shoreward in ripples and eddies, from the devious wake of the craft. Little land turtles dropped off sunny logs into the water with a splash as the canoe approached. Fish leaped to the surface now and then as if to see what was going on above, disappearing so quickly that they were heard but seldom seen. The trees bending over the water thick and close, save where the banks were steep, cast shadows reaching to the bottom of the river. Sometimes songs or harsher cries of wild birds were heard along the dark shore line. Once a lean, gray wolf leaped from the water's edge and disappeared in the underbrush as the canoe passed round a bend. Again a pheasant flew from its drinking place at the water's side with so violent and loud a whirr of wings that Nell nearly fell overboard.

And so passed the long summer afternoon—long in hours, but all too short to those who hoped they were traveling toward friends, and valued every minute.

Toward sundown Clay espied a little bay or cove at the left bank of the stream, and proposing to run in there and have supper, the others assented and without mishap a landing was effected.

Making a careful survey of the situation and observing the thick growth of trees and brush all about, Captain Clay expressed the belief that a small fire could be built without much danger; and at the side of a knoll, opposite that side which was toward the river, and some distance back from the stream, a blaze was started by the laborious flint and spark process. Nell washed some potatoes for roasting, while Clay and Fred drew the dugout up out of sight among some willows, and in due time the supper of potatoes and green corn, the latter roasted in its husks among the coals, was ready.

How much one enjoys a feast depends largely upon his appetite, and this fare from which Fred, at least, would have turned away in scorn but a few months before, he now ate, as did Clay and Nell, with much relish. It was dark by the time the meal was over, and whether again to embark or remain where they were, was a question the little party had not yet decided. Their plan had been to travel by

night as well as by day; but none, except Nell, perhaps, could hope to sleep when the canoe was in motion, lest it capsize with them; and thus, as all were tired out, they agreed to lie by until the coming of the very first streak of daylight.

It was still quite dark in the woods when the chattering of birds awoke Clay, and he slipped down to the river with his hook and line and the bait. He would not have time to fish long, he knew, but he hoped to provide a light breakfast. Scarcely had he baited the hook and dropped it in than there came a tugging at the line which made him jump. The lad had picked up a mere stick to use as a fishing pole, but fortunately it was strong, for there came another and another tugging at the line, harder each time than before.

Much excited and surprised, Clay kept the line taut, as it was carried this way and that, knowing full well that to let it become slack would result in its breaking and his losing the fish. Presently the pulling and tugging ceased. Steadily Clay drew the line in, despite the vigorous protests from the other end, and so drawing it to the shore, he seized and

held in his hands, at last, a bass which must have weighed nearly four pounds.

"Glory, ain't he a prize!"

Clay caught his breath in a sigh of delight.

The surprise of Fred as he rubbed his eyes and looked at the big fish, and Nell's pleasure as she also awakened, added still more to the lad's gratification, and he would have liked few things better, just then, than to fish all day.

To do this was out of the question. So while Fred and Nell rekindled the fire, Clay dressed the big bass, and a delicious breakfast it made. Then the fire was put out with a kettleful of water, the canoe was launched once more and the journey was resumed.

The sun was two hours high, and a narrow place in the river had been reached when Clay turned quickly around, held up one hand for quiet and intently listened.

"I thought I heard something like footsteps—someone running along the bank," he whispered.

The lad had seized his rifle and, carefully rising in the unsteady craft, looked searchingly among the trees and bushes at both sides. "I didn't hear

anything; but, bless me, I wasn't listening, I'm ashamed to say," Fred whispered in answer, after a few seconds of silence.

"I was mistaken, maybe," was the reply, and Clay returned to his paddle, placing the rifle in the prow of the pirogue, its long barrel sticking out like a bowsprit.

A few rods down the stream, it was necessary for the canoe to pass under a tree which had fallen partially across the river and lay a little more than a foot above the water.

"Duck your heads!" Clay softly called, and as the bow of the canoe shot under, there glided from behind the log, a dirty copper-colored hand. In an instant the red fingers had seized the rifle and dragged it upward, and a warwhoop of savage triumph broke the silence.

CHAPTER XVII.

CAPTIVES THREE.

A pistol shot answered the warrior's cry. Fred had caught sight of the savage as the latter leaped to his feet, and hastily fired—so hastily, indeed, that the bullet flew wide. He could not fire again, for he must bend low to escape the log. Gently the canoe passed under the obstruction, and Clay giving a strong push with his paddle, sent the craft forward at increased speed.

Fred had dropped his paddle, and now stood erect, pistol in hand. With white face and frightened eyes, Nell sat in her place and tried to steady the violent rocking of the boat.

"Give me your pistol while you load the other,"

Clay called excitedly, turning half around, leaving the canoe to drift.

Without a word, Fred tossed the weapon forward and kneeled down to reload the pistol he had fired. The Indian had disappeared, but might be expected at any moment to fire from cover.

For full two minutes,—it seemed as many hours to the canoe's occupants, the pirogue drifted with the slow current.

"Run her ashore! We'll chase that redskin down. I believe he's alone!" called Fred at last.

As if in answer, there came a chorus of warwhoops from a thickly wooded point a few rods down stream, and a volley of bullets rained about the Lady Mary, one splitting the paddle at Clay's side.

"Let have at the first one you see! We've got to get to the other shore and run for it!" cried Clay. "Take both pistols, Fred! Hand me that other paddle, Nell!"

The girl snatched the paddle behind her and passed it to her brother. With feverish haste, the latter fell to work to run the dugout to the eastern shore.

Detecting his purpose, three Indians showed

themselves at the water's edge on the wooded point at the western side, now but a score of yards distant, and one bold fellow plunged into the water.

Fred fired; the fellow disappeared beneath the surface, but whether injured, or only diving, could not be told.

Holding the fire of his remaining pistol, Fred waited. Rapidly now the canoe was reaching the eastern bank.

"We'll be all right yet," came from between Clay's clenched teeth, as he glanced over his shoulder, giving his paddle the full depth of its blade, and pulling with furious energy.

"Look! They'll be ahead of us!"

It was Nell's voice, and she pointed to the rear toward three Indians running out upon a log, leaping into shallow water from its top, and making for the east bank.

Fred fired at the foremost of the three but missed completely. He stopped to reload, while Clay, by vigorous strokes, turned the canoe down stream. Scarcely had the pirogue swung around, however, than there bobbed out of the water close to its side, a half-clothed figure—an Indian, who grappled with

Fred, and drew him overboard. It was the savage at whom he had fired and who had dived.

Seizing the broken paddle, Nell beat the Indian furiously about the head, but only a few blows did she strike ere she herself was grasped from the other side, and her stout young arms held as in a vice. At the same moment, and from the same side, Clay was seized, the canoe almost capsizing as his arms were pinioned in a redman's grasp.

Fred, struggling madly, heroically, with the savage who had drawn him into the river, discovered the situation of his friends and knew it was useless to fight further.

"I surrender; stop choking me, you fiend!" he gasped, and as he released his hold upon the Indian's arms, the savage understood the action, if not the words, and, tightly holding the boy's wrist, led him ashore.

Clay, also, had ceased to struggle, but the Indian who had grasped his arms, still held him in a grip like iron, while the savage who had captured Nell, released her, and with her and Clay still in the canoe, assisted the third of the three who had run out upon the log, in pushing the pirogue ashore.

At no place was the water more than shoulder deep upon the redskins, and though the river widened out below the fallen tree, the shore was quickly reached. Meantime, the brave who had captured Fred, was leading the boy over the stream upon the log and then, hurrying along the clayey edge of the water with his prisoner, joined the others soon after the canoe was beached.

Clay and Nell were roughly led up the sloping bank, and while three Indians watched them and Fred, the others drew the dugout out of the water and calmly inspected its contents, one holding up the bear-trap as a prize of much value.

"'Pon honor, they're dirty ruffians! Do you s'pose they know that water is for anything but to drink?" said Fred, contemptuously, seating himself upon the grass.

Clay was closely observing the Indians and did not reply. He saw that there were seven of the savages, clothed only below the waist, save for an abundance of war paint. Their faces, arms and bodies were gaudily striped and marked with black, yellow and bright red. Two of the party were very young; not much older than himself or Fred, Clay

estimated. The others were of full stature but not old, excepting the warrior who had seized the rifle out of the canoe, and still held the weapon. He was elderly—sixty years old, perhaps—but still straight and muscular. The feathers he wore, and a silver coin hung by a leather string about his neck, seemed to mark him as a chief of some degree.

"Some are Delawares, some Mingoes," thought Clay, as he heard their talk, then he turned to say some soothing words to Nell, who was doing her best to hold back the tears.

Fred also joined in saying:

"Cheer up, Nell. Things might be worse. And I want you to know this: I'll kill the first red wretch who mistreats you, now bless me if I don't and be hanged to them!"

Fred's whole manner was haughtily defiant. His words caught the ear of the old chief who, rifle still in hand, was watching the inspection of the canoe. Turning suddenly he said:

"Fool! Young Long-Knife heap big fool!"

"Ditto," said Fred, scornfully, and in spite of her mental anguish, Nell smiled.

Whether the Indian understood may well be

doubted, but he knew from Fred's tone that the word was one of disrespect, and with the barrel of the rifle gave the boy a sharp rap upon the head.

Leaping to his feet, the blood streaming from a gash above his ear, the over-bold lad would have sprung upon the Indian, but the latter made a thrust toward him with the rifle to ward him off, and Clay taking his friend's hand, begged him to be quiet, for he could accomplish nothing, but would make their unhappy situation still worse. Nell also urged Fred to bear himself more calmly, and contenting himself with saying that his turn would come yet, the lad remained quiet.

After a few minutes, two of the Indians got into the canoe, pushed off from shore, and paddled away down stream. Another went away, traveling up the river along the bank, while the four remaining tied the hands of their prisoners, and putting the boys and Nell in the center, marched off through the woods in single file.

The elderly Indian remained in command of the party which marched the young captives away. The two youthful braves and a giant of a fellow having a large beak-like nose and only one eye—

giving his face an appearance of peculiar ferocity, while the sunken cavity where the other eye had been added to his repulsiveness—were with the chief.

Not a word did the savages speak. But those in the rear were watching the prisoners closely, and mercilessly rapped them on the heads with their gun barrels if Clay or Fred or Nell made a misstep or for a single instant slackened the good round pace the leader set. The day was exceedingly warm and the air full of a stickiness that made the rapid walk most wearying, the marchers wet with perspiration, hot, thirsty, and altogether as completely wretched and uncomfortable as they well could be.

For more than an hour, the march was continued, a halt being called at last beside a brook, where two of the Indians knelt to drink. While they waited, another Indian,—the big, one-eyed fellow—suddenly flashed his scalping knife and seizing a braid of Nell's hair, made a quick motion with the knife as though he would take her scalp. Nell's scream of fright drew Fred's attention to what was going on. Bound though his hands were, his feet were free, and he wheeled and gave the savage a kick in the

region of the floating ribs which brought a howl of pain. Dearly, however, the lad paid for his action. In a trice the Indian sprang upon him, bore him down and pounded and kicked him with all the brutality of his barbarous instincts, leaving off only when drawn forcibly away by the old chief.

Feeling that Fred had brought this suffering and pain upon himself all on her account, the tears came chasing one another down Nell's cheeks, and in choking tones she begged the boy not to mind her, saying that they must all bear the kicks and cuffs and insults heaped upon them as best they could, and not make matters worse by trying to fight with their hands tied.

Clay joined in this reasoning. He was sure the one-eyed Indian had meant only to frighten Nell—which was, in truth, the case—but yet he could not but feel an admiration for Fred's pluck and spirit, much as he regretted the added trouble it must make them if it were not curbed.

"Want water?" asked the chief, of the captives, when all the Indians had drunk.

"Oh, Please!" and Nell stepped forward.

The chief detained her for a half minute, but

Fred and Clay, who had also expressed a desire to drink, were allowed to approach the brook and pitch themselves forward upon the stones to reach the water as best they could with their hands tied behind them. The one-eyed savage was very near and leaned over the boys as they were putting their lips to the water; and at that instant, he suddenly seized them each by the neck and jerked the lads to their feet. It was torture of the most wicked and cowardly kind. From Fred's hot, blood-stained lips, there came but one word: "Coward!" And then, like Clay, he bore his pain with unflinching, unmoved stoicism.

The two young Indians gave little yells of savage delight as they saw One-Eye perpetrate his joke, and the old chief grunted an indifferent "Ugh," neither pleased nor displeased, apparently. But he turned now to Nell and saying, quite kindly "Drink," would have led her to the water's edge. Angrily she drew back, and, turning to the one-eyed creature, still holding the boys by their necks, cried furiously:

"You brute—you ugly——"

Finding no words to complete her sentence, to

express her horror and righteous wrath, the little girl could only allow her eyes to fill with tears again; and though the chief gently patted her shoulder, as if to coax her, she would not drink of the water that was denied her friends.

One-Eye vented his spite against Nell for this by bumping the two boy's heads together in a particularly vicious manner, while he made an ugly grimace at her, and then the march was resumed.

What thoughts—what wild plans for escape, for revenge, for a turning of the tables upon their captors, crowded into the minds of Clay and Fred as they tramped on and on, it would be difficult to tell. And Nell, as well, was thinking of these things. She wished she were a man, a living Goliath, with a rifle and pistols to use,—and free for just a few minutes—she would show them! She would make the one-eyed monster the sorriest savage the woods ever contained, see if she wouldn't.

But it was all of no use. What could two boys and a girl do against two bigger boys and two men, all fully armed, while their own hands were tied behind them and they had not even their fists at their command? Some such thought as this came

to Clay, and although he did not give up nor for a moment forget or cease to watch for an opportunity to free himself and his companions, he realized that all he could do was to bear his suffering patiently and wait; and so by degrees his heated brain grew calmer.

In a lesser degree, much the same was true of Fred. He felt that he could and would bear any pain or any humiliation which he might be forced to undergo, though it were the torture stake—and he did not doubt that that was what the Indians had in mind for him; but if he should see Nell harmed or mistreated in any way, he knew that he must fight, that he could no more restrain himself than he could stop the roar of thunder or the flashing of lightning—nor would he try. Was this the chivalry of ancestors of knighthood days, whose blood ran in his veins? Fred would not have known had he been asked, and the inquiry did not occur to his own mind then or afterward. He only knew that, though he died for it the next moment, he would resent with his last breath the slightest indignity which this bright-eyed forest flower might suffer. Nor did he so much as ask himself the reason.

And when on a later day he saw the cruel, merciless one-eyed Indian, who at this moment walked behind him, often out of sheer bloodthirstiness and malice, pricking him with a scalping knife,—saw the wretch suffer and strive in vain against the death he deserved, there was no pity in his heart. Neither was there exultation. There then came the thought that his hands were stained with blood; that he had killed a human being; but he knew that he was not a murderer, that he was, instead, only the means by which the earth had been rid of one of the vilest, bloodiest Indians of all the Northwest Territory.

CHAPTER XVIII.

AT THE INDIANS' MERCY.

A little after noon, the Indians halted on a pleasant hillside where the forest was more open, admitting a cooling breeze which fanned them—fanning the three captives, too, though the savages would have prevented it, doubtless, if they could. From this hillside one of the young braves went forward alone.

As they waited, the redskins threw themselves upon the ground, and Nell was allowed likewise to sit down; but when Clay and Fred sought thus to rest themselves, the one-eyed Indian seized them by the hair, one in each hand, and literally lifted them to their feet again. The boys bore this abuse in silence, and One-Eye began amusing himself by

switching their bare defenseless hands with a whip he made from a hickory sprout. And ever as the lads tried to step beyond his reach, the young brave remaining, prodded their legs and bodies with a sharp stick thrust in the muzzle of his rifle.

The elderly Indian watched these proceedings with indifference and after one or two efforts to escape the reach of their tormentors, Clay and Fred bore the pain without showing the least sign that they felt it. Poor Nellie, however, could not endure it and turned her tearful eyes away.

At the end of an hour, the buck who had gone in advance returned, bringing with him nearly a score of other Indians, young and old, who gloated over the captives in savage exultation and entertained themselves by kicking and cuffing them, carrying off their hats and rifling their pockets. Nell, for some reason, was unharmed, nor was she touched, save by one old warrior who ran his fore-finger through her soft hair, drawing a few tresses out to their full length, admiringly. The old fellow never knew how near he was to being assaulted! for Fred was watching, in spite of all he was being made to suffer, and had Nell been either frightened or

harmed, he would have thrown himself upon the savage without the slightest hesitation.

Leisurely the Indians now took up the march again, giving frequent warwhoops to notify those remaining in their village of their approach. A number of squaws and children and a few more braves came out to meet the party and the prisoners, yelling and making many gestures of delight. Both Clay and Fred feared that at the hands of the squaws Nell would be spared nothing. Fred spoke of this in a low tone, and turning to the chief, whose name and position had become known to the captives through the conversations they overheard, Clay said respectfully:

"Walking-Horse, we expect you to take care that no rough hand is put upon this girl who is with us. She is no common creature, and whoever harms her will suffer ten times over for it."

"She is the daughter," said Fred, seriously, elaborating upon Clay's thought, "She is the daughter of one who will crush whole tribes of Indians like dry leaves in his hands if any harm comes to her. She could be exchanged for a cart load of your greatest

chiefs. And you better give your squaws and all the others fair warning."

Clay suffered twinges of conscience for the words he had spoken, for they were not absolutely true, perhaps; but Fred did not. He had not been trained in the same strict school as Clay and his sister, and while he would have scorned to lie for gain, or to have escaped pain himself, he felt that any artifice which might be resorted to, to make frightened, tearful Nell the less unhappy, would be entirely justifiable.

Walking-Horse shrugged his shoulders with an "Ugh!" in response to the boys' warning; and while he seemed to give them no further heed, it was noticeable at once when the Indians at the village gathered around with their taunts and jeers and many varieties of torment, such as slyly pricking the captives with thorns, and throwing mud and ashes upon them, that he made it a point to remain near Nell's side; and by a word and gesture he indicated that she must not be touched.

At the collection of huts and wigwams, made of bark and skins, which constituted the Indian village, Walking-Horse led Nell away to his own lodge

where she was taken in charge by a squaw whom the boys rightly guessed to be his wife. Clay and Fred, however, were bound to a post in a vacant bark shack and left to the mercy of a dozen little Indians, both boys and girls, ranging in age from six to ten years, perhaps. The barbarous fun these infant savages then had was much more pleasant to them than to the two prisoners. And yet these youngsters feared the boys, as children might fear a bear though it were chained, and did not approach too near; and finally when Fred made signs as if he would eat them up, they retreated still further and contented themselves with throwing sticks and stones at the helpless young Palefaces through the wide door of the hut.

Despite this torment, Clay and Fred now found an opportunity to talk, though a number of braves lingered near.

"I' faith, there's even a grain of comfort in the thought that the worst they can do is burn us at the stake," Fred muttered.

"There's many a thing that may happen before they do that," Clay answered. "Panther Dilly surely knew what he was talking about, and if

there's any party of white men any place near, there will be a fight before long. It's plain, though, that these red cut-throats don't know of it if the Virginians are coming this way."

"I'm going to cut the very first chance I get, and you do the same, Clay," Fred whispered, "and we will make an agreement that if either of us can get away, he will bring a party of soldiers here from Fort Pitt or somewhere, if he has to swim rivers and climb mountains to do it. We've got to look out for Nell, and that's the only way."

"We'll get away together if we can, but don't forget, I agree to all you said, if we can't. I'll never forget you, Fred."

"And if I get away and come back——"

The whispering was interrupted by a squaw who drove the yelling, tormenting little Indians away and entered the hut with a rude bowl filled with water, which she held that the captives might drink. This they eagerly did, and though warm and insipid, the draught was very refreshing to parched lips and dry throats.

Clay took pains to make signs that they would like something to eat, as well as the drink, where-

upon the woman said in good English, but coldly:

"Long-Knives gave the Indians no meat and no water."

Again she drove away the little savages who had clustered about the hut, and so left the boys.

"Hear the way she spoke?" said Clay, when the woman was gone. "I'll bet she's the daughter or granddaughter of the white woman who was married to a Delaware chief. The woman was taken prisoner when she was a little girl and always lived with the Indians. There's a creek or river, off to the west of here, named the 'White Woman'—named for her."

"I'd like to be married to an Indian," Fred growled.

"Well, this white woman killed the chief, in the end, anyway. She must have had some little civilization left," Clay replied. "But it was because she was jealous of another woman," he added as an afterthought.

"But why do they call the whites the Long-Knife or the Long-Knives?" Fred asked, "I thought they always called us Palefaces."

"Some of 'em do. Panther Dilly says it comes

from the early explorers, and afterward a good many of the soldiers, carrying swords—long knives, you see. I'd like to stick a good big sword through half a dozen of those little savages!"

As for some time no one came near except the barbarous little boys and girls and two older Indians who were sitting in the shade nearby on guard, the two prisoners again fell to talking of plans for escape. As well as he could, Clay gave a description of their general geographical surroundings, for, since leaving the river, Fred had become quite turned around as to the points of the compass.

To the south and west a score of miles, as nearly as Clay could estimate, was the Delaware town of Goschachgunk, or Gosh-Goshing, at the forks of the White Woman or Walhonding Creek or River, and the Muskingum, or Tuscarawas, as the latter stream was sometimes called above these forks. On the river, about due east, Clay judged, was the Moravian Mission, Schoenbrun.

"We would have passed the Moravians' place, going down the river, in another mile or two," he said, referring to this settlement. "I think the rea-

son we were marched overland, maybe, instead of being taken by way of the river, was so as not to pass the mission."

To the northeast about twenty-five miles, Clay thought, was the place where the great trail from Fort Pitt to the west crossed the Muskingum or Tuscarawas—the spot at which the savages had attacked Fred's father's party. Seven or eight miles south and west of that spot were the clearing and the nest in the ash, the latter being, therefore, in the neighborhood of twenty miles directly across country northeast of this Indian village in which the lads were.

"It will take longer to reach Fort Pitt than the river cabins," said Clay, "but Fort Pitt is the place to cut for, because most likely the settlers on the river will have been driven away or killed, especially as they are mostly Virginians. The fort is nigh onto a hundred miles, or maybe a little more, but there's the trail to follow after you once strike the river. And if you should be alone, Fred, watch out for Indians, especially along the high ground. The land trails are most always along the high land, and even if they follow river or creek they are

mostly up away from the water, maybe a half a mile."

In vain Clay tried to make a sort of map upon the ground with his heels to give Fred a better understanding of the locations he was trying to explain. He could not do so, for, as they were tied to opposite sides of the post, Fred could see little that he did. Both could look up at the bark roof of the hut, however, and thinking of this, Clay named a certain knot-hole in the bark as their present location, then named other marks as indicating the Crossing Place of the Muskingum, the clearing, Fort Pitt and other localities, while a long, irregular worm track was made to represent the river Muskingum.

As the afternoon was drawing to a close there suddenly was heard a commotion among the Indians which set the hearts of the captives beating hard in hope that it heralded the approach of the white soldiers. But they were disappointed in this, for the excitement was caused only by the arrival of runners with fresh news of the mighty army which Cornstalk, the Shawnee chieftain, was gathering to meet an army of Long-Knives which he was ex-

pecting to march upon the Shawnee towns upon the Scioto. Logan, the Mingo, and Cornstalk were joining their forces to raise an army, which, they believed, would drive all the Palefaces beyond the Ohio River forever.

The one-eyed savage brought the runners to look at the boy captives and entertained them by forcing earth from the dirty floor of the hut into the mouths of the defenseless lads, saying they had not been fed and would be getting hungry. The runners each gave the boys a few kicks, also, but he of the single eye, deeming that they did not kick hard enough, kicked the prisoners himself. That their ribs were not broken was little less than a miracle.

It was not until some time later that the boys learned the news which the Shawnee runners brought, but they knew that the two strange Indians had just arrived and that their coming and that information they gave interested the Delawares and Mingoes greatly. To some extent the lads correctly guessed what was going on—that fighting was expected somewhere; but at the first opportunity they returned once more to their effort to form a feasible plan of escape. At best, they could

do little more than to plan, until dark, but they told one another they would remain awake, though feigning sleep, and make the most of the first opportunity which came to them.

It was nearly sundown when the squaw who had brought the water for the captives again entered the wretched place of their confinement and gave to each a small piece of jerked venison. The boys could eat only by holding the meat between their knees and gnawing it as a dog would gnaw a bone. The Indian woman placed the food in this position for them, saying:

"Eat like dogs! dogs you are—white dogs!" And she gave Fred a spiteful rap on the head with her knuckles when he asked if he might not have one hand free. Having fasted since morning the boys ate as best they could, hoping that Nell was faring better, as in fact she was, though not much; for the squaw would not release her hands, but fed to her with her own fingers the venison she tore to shreds, in the cabin of Walking-Horse.

In the early twilight there arrived in the Indian town the two savages, one of whom was he who had gone up stream after the capture of the Lady Mary.

Evidently he had been searching along the river for other white persons, the Indians having considered it strange that two boys and a girl should be so far within the forest alone. These two savages came to have a look at the captives in the hut and One-Eye accompanied them. As before, he was the most malicious and brutal of all in inflicting torment and pain upon the white youths.

"The fiends who went down river in the canoe are to come yet and maybe that will end it," said Fred vengefully between his teeth.

"And maybe we won't be here when they come," Clay whispered, more in hope than in confidence, however.

Had Clay dreamed of the hardships, the privations, the physical suffering, the heartaches awaiting them—further recounted in *The Cabin in the Clearing*—hope would have been dead within him. How all-wise, all-kind is the Providence that veils the future from our view!

THE END.

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